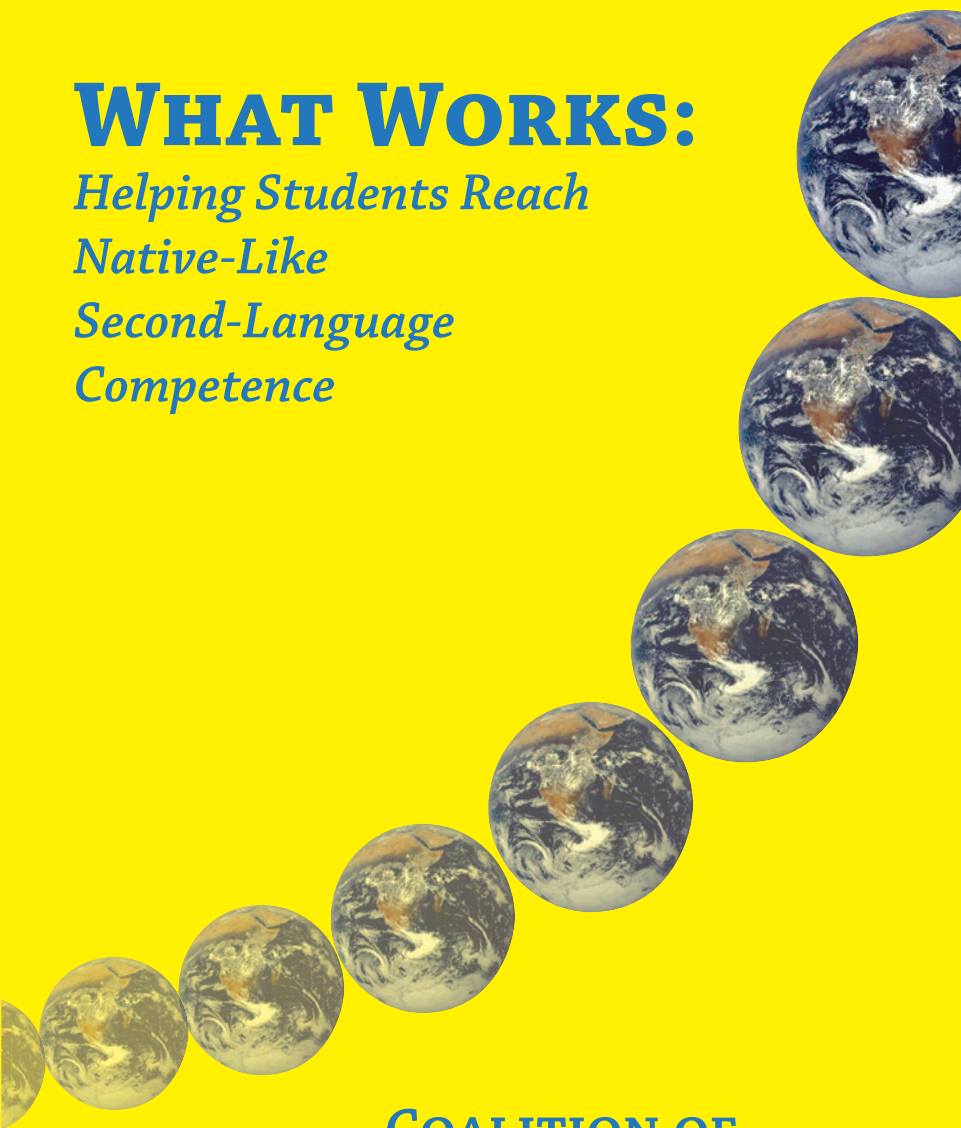


# WHAT WORKS:

*Helping Students Reach  
Native-Like  
Second-Language  
Competence*



COALITION OF  
DISTINGUISHED  
LANGUAGE CENTERS

# **What Works:**

## **Helping Students Reach Native-Like Second-Language Competence**

### **Coalition of Distinguished Language Centers**

(Authorial Collective: Rajai AL-Khanji, James Bernhardt, Gerd Brendel, Tseng Tseng Chang, Dan Davidson, Christian Degueldre, Madeline Ehrman, Surendra Gambhir, Jaiying Howard, Frederick Jackson, Cornelius Kubler, Betty Lou Leaver, Maria Lekić, Natalia Lord, Michael Morrissey, Boris Shekhtman, Kenneth Shepard, Svetlana Sibrina)

*CDLC Staff*

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Any opinions in this book expressed by those individuals among the authorial collective who are employed at US government language schools are the authors' opinions alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the US government.

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# Introduction

Many articles have appeared, especially in the United States, of late that condemn the appalling state in which very few Americans are able to communicate at a native-like level of language and culture with citizens of other countries. This impairs the ability of the United States to interact appropriately, let alone well, in the international arena and makes its leaders dependent on fluent speakers from other countries.

Underlying these articles, concerns, and even increasing levels of government funding for language programs is the assumption that native-like language competence not only is not being achieved in foreign-language programs but also that inherently it cannot be achieved, given what we currently know about second language acquisition. Ironically, quietly, in a small number of programs that are unheralded, students have been brought to native-like levels of foreign-language proficiency frequently and even routinely. It is not easy for either student or teacher; in fact, teachers generally find teaching highly proficient students to be significantly more challenging than teaching students at lower levels of proficiency (often contrary to their initial expectations). There is no magic formula, no perfect method; it requires targeted time on targeted task and intense individualization. Nonetheless, with the right set of variables, students do reach native-like proficiency, and teachers do help them to get there.

Where most programs that would like to bring students to high levels err is in thinking that contemporary approaches used at lower levels of instruction will, with enough time, bring students to the highest levels. However, survey results indicate that this is not the case. The instruction, curriculum, and program design used in high-level language study must differ significantly from language instruc-



tion at lower levels—or, perhaps, as some have suggested, we need to re-consider how we currently teach language at all levels. This conviction is held by both highly proficient language learners and highly successful language teachers with learning and teaching experience at the superior and distinguished levels of proficiency, and it is reflected in the pages of this book. The articles in this book do not focus on general good teaching practices, and therefore assumptions and practices that are uniform across all levels of proficiency and well known to foreign language teachers are not included here. Rather, the “smorgasbord” of practices described in these pages is the result of focusing very narrowly on those specific practices that either must change or be introduced at higher levels of proficiency if students who have reached Superior-level proficiency are to reach a level that approximates that of the native speaker and allows the student to a language user who can participate in sophisticated and culturally appropriate ways in all social and professional facets of the target culture.

The “recipes” for developing high-level proficiency contained in this booklet are summaries of the experience of the members of the Coalition of Distinguished Language Centers and participants in its annual conferences and represent successful practices that in some cases have been used for more than two decades. Teachers with high-level-proficiency teaching experience are, indeed, a nearly microscopic subset of the body of foreign-language teachers in the USA and abroad. The information contained in these pages comes from this small but highly experienced and successful set of teachers. In all cases, the advice that has been gathered in these pages comes from individuals who are not only program managers and/or teachers for high-level proficiency but who have themselves also learned one or more foreign languages to a native-like level of proficiency.

None of the advice in these pages comes from theorists, researchers, or even leading language teachers and gurus who have not been able to achieve superior and distinguished levels of foreign-language proficiency themselves or who have not had a relative wealth of personal success in teaching students at the highest levels of proficiency. This is the first time that the information has been

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distilled into one concise set of formulae for getting from low-level to high-level.

The purpose of this book is two-fold. First, the CDLC wants to make a statement that bringing students to high levels of foreign language proficiency in the United States (and even elsewhere) *can* be done. Second, the CDLC wants to show *how* it can be done, based on decades of combined success of its members.



## Individualize the Learning Plan

Current qualitative and quantitative research, as well as feedback from CDLC Conference roundtables with high-level language users that address the question, “How I Did It,” consistently point to one irrefutable and very important fact: there are nearly as many paths to near-native proficiency as there are near-native language users. Not only that, but high-level polyglots (those individuals who have reached high-level proficiency in more than one foreign language) report different paths—sometimes highly divergent paths—for reaching native-like proficiency in each of the languages.

This leads to two conclusions generally shared by high-level teachers. The first has to do with teaching method, the second with language planning as part of the teaching process.

The evidence is quite clear that no specific teaching method will bring a learner from novice to distinguished level. While many of the teachers whose work is summarized in this volume have been leaders in the development of the concepts of today’s cutting edge methods, such as content-based instruction, task-based instruction, and the looser concept of communicative methods, and use liberal doses of them in their classrooms, none of these have been shown to bring students to native-like proficiency although content-based instruction, when combined with real-life classroom tasks, can help students more quickly approach the superior level—but only if combined with diagnostic assessment and a healthy dose of diagnostic teaching (learner-based instruction).

Further, the evidence is also clear that what works in English as a Second/Foreign Language may be less effective in Arabic, Chi-

nese, French, German, or Russian as a Second/Foreign Language. In other words, while teachers of various languages can add to the dialogue of how best to teach a foreign language, the successful practices of one set of language teachers cannot necessarily adequately inform the practices of teachers of another language. Learning Russian or Arabic *is* different from learning English or French, and vice versus.

Any teacher who has taught high-level language successfully and has acquired high-level proficiency in multiple languages knows this; so do polyglots, who repeatedly state that they used different methods for learning different languages because the nature of the languages themselves required such an approach. Some of this is because semantics are language-specific, as are cultural phenomena and even “mentality” (ways of thinking). Some of this is because the nature of the linguistic systems used to make meaning differs in very significant ways that have a clear impact on acquisition: where there are parallels with one’s own language, the system is usually more quickly acquired; where there are imperfect parallels, native-language schemata must be adapted; and where there is no overlap at all, new schemata must be developed. For this reason, it is typically more difficult for a speaker of English to acquire a language like Arabic or Chinese, and in turn, the teaching methods and tools for assisting students in acquiring English are less likely to be as effective for assisting students in acquiring languages that are not closely related in semantics, syntax, morphology, mechanisms for showing structural and functional relationships among lexemes, and “where” to look for meaning. Thus, a single, universal method for language acquisition is not likely to be effective, especially if it denies the importance of other methods in bringing Superior-level students to native-like proficiency.

Learners took differing approaches to successful acquisition of high-level language also based on their learning styles. Students with thin boundaries (those who tend to merge thought and emotions and easily accept external influences) were often quicker to look for a friend from the other culture to lead them to sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence than were students with thick boundaries who preferred to glean this information from movies, books, and observation from a distance. Ectenic learners (those

who learn atomistically, in bottom-up ways) were more likely to reach the Superior level with “clean” language, i.e. language free of mis-speaking and mis-typing, than synoptic learners although the latter generally have reached the Superior level with a better “feel” for the language. Each has a different task to accomplish in perfecting his or her language to the point of being considered near-native in proficiency.

Some students have been born with a talent for language. In some cases, it is an intuitive understanding of linguistic structure; in other cases, it is a “good ear.” Other students have more moderate language aptitude. Yet, all have reached native levels of proficiency in their own language, and even students with moderate (or lower) scores on language aptitude tests are represented among the elite group that has achieved Superior and Distinguished levels of language proficiency.

Languages were learned in different ways also because serendipity led individuals to have differing opportunities while in language study. Some individuals had home or community environments where a foreign language was spoken. Others had reached the Advanced level before an opportunity to travel abroad appeared. Some were surrounded by émigré communities; others were isolated and depended on pen-pals and, today’s students, the Internet.

What this all boils down to is that for each student who desires to reach native-like proficiency, there needs to be a plan. That plan needs to take into account that student’s current proficiency level (including strengths and weaknesses in all language and culture areas), learning styles, personal interests and needs, nature of aptitude, and realistic opportunities for learning, along with a clear understanding of the linguistic and cultural peculiarities of the language being studied that set the teaching of it apart from the teaching of other languages. This requires the teacher to set aside platitudes that are commonly held in today’s language-teaching field. It requires the teacher to set aside personal learning preferences and experiences, understanding that “what works for me” may not be “what works for my student.” It requires the teacher to experiment, to replace “should” with “what if,” and to be receptive to new or at least different ways of teaching.

Learning plans, however, are not one-shot deals. Once established, typically together with the learner, they need to be revised periodically as students' proficiency increases, learning opportunities change, and personal interests move in new directions. The learning plan is not a destination; it is a road map and, as such, a working document.

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## **Conduct Periodic Diagnostic Assessment**

Successful foreign-language programs at the Superior and Distinguished level (e.g., the advanced Russian course at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), which began in 1984) have, for years, used diagnostic assessment as a mechanism for determining how best to shape and individualize instruction. Most of the US government language schools now routinely conduct diagnostic assessments for many, if not most, of their students as a way of making instruction the most efficient possible, as well as effective. Diagnostic assessment has also been used for a long time in successful private foreign-language programs aimed at helping students reach native-like proficiency (e.g., at the Specialized Language Center [SLTC] in Rockville, Maryland).

In the early 1990s, the Defense Language Institute (DLI) used recall protocols as a way of attempting to determine strengths and weaknesses in receptive skills and then developed lessons to shore up the weaknesses in individual students. Since those days, the DLI has made many strides forward in diagnosis. In the early 2000s, “can-do” statements, later used by other organizations and programs (e.g., the LangNet self-leveling questions), to help students self-assess their proficiency level, along with strengths and weaknesses within a level. In very recent years, the DLI has developed the Diagnostic Assessment process into a formal tool that is used with military language programs worldwide. The tools that they use include a learning styles test, a four-skills interview, a follow-up counseling session, and an individualized learning plan. The Direc-

torate of Continuing Education where the Diagnostic Assessors are currently assigned has prepared Diagnostic Kits—packets of reading and listening materials, samples of learning plans, instructions to assessors, and the like.

Expanding upon diagnostic assessments used in the Russian and Asian & African Sections in the early 1980s, in 1989, the Foreign Service Institute established a new directorate: Research, Evaluation, and Development. One of the innovations of this directorate was the FSI Learning Consultation Service, which offers diagnostic assessment services to all departments and students. The counseling center uses learning style questionnaires, proficiency information from certified testers and examiners, student self-reports about strengths/weaknesses and learning experiences, and teacher observations. Diagnostic results and suggestions are conveyed to students for learning purposes and (with student permission) to specially trained instructional staff for use with the students in their continued study.

For students of Russian, the Specialized Language Training Center in Rockville, Maryland uses a level test based on sophistications in translation, a test for automaticity, assessment using syntactic models, a grammar test, and learning styles feedback. The assessment is expected to determine weaknesses in intrasentential case usage and functions, aspect, late-acquired verb types (verbs of motion and reflexive verbs), participial phrases & verbal adverbs (also typically late-acquired in Russian), specialized terminology (upon student request), syntax (which differs significantly from English and commonly taught foreign languages), sociolinguistic elements (including register), genre, dialectal speech (including standard, substandard and regional forms), cultural allusions, and ellipsis. The diagnostic assessment is also shared with students to help them understand their strengths, weaknesses, and learning needs, and as a starting point for a learning plan.

A useful diagnostic assessment consists of a number of items. Any one diagnostic procedure will differ from another, but they all have certain things in common. Specifically, all diagnostic assessments with which the CDLC is familiar include some form of proficiency/performance/competency testing\* that identifies in a fairly refined manner the strengths and weaknesses in student language,

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feedback on learning styles, some form of output (typically, an individualized learning plan), advice to teachers for program/course/lesson adaptation, and some form of sharing of the assessment results with the learner.

Diagnostic teaching, based on the results of diagnostic assessment, can be accomplished at any level of proficiency. At the highest levels, however, from the experience of the majority of teachers in CDLC member institutions, diagnostic teaching is not an option: it is a mandate.

\*It is not the purpose of this book to enter into current ongoing discussions of the efficacy of the extant proficiency level descriptions or the usefulness of the current testing system. These are the topics of other kinds of books, and the resolution of the issues currently being raised in these areas is very likely to be long in coming. The purpose of this book is to make the most of what is available—and proven useful—for the high-level student.

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## Incorporate Sensitivity to Learning Styles

Teachers working with language students at all levels have for some decades now recognized that students have specific sensory and cognitive preferences when it comes to learning and specific ways of interacting with classmates. These individual differences can be very important both in positive and negative ways in the language process, the significance of which may change as one progresses up the ladder of proficiency.

One of the phenomena that has been observed by language teachers and their students over time is the “tortoise and hare” syndrome. Students who are painfully accurate—and therefore slow—in the beginning of language study often outdistance their faster peers who can plateau at the Advanced/Superior threshold because they have become comfortable with being “awfully fluent.”

What is clear to teachers of high-level students and to students themselves is that language and communication depend upon many variables. It is not enough to be a good reader (as visual learners usually are) or a good listener (as auditory learners usually are). A high-level language user must be a good reader *and* a good listener, regardless of sensory preference.

In the same way, it is not enough to be fluent (as most synoptic learners are) or accurate (as most ectenic learners are). One must be both fluent and accurate. It is not enough to see the underlying patterns (as levelers do) or to notice the fine structural, cultural, behavioral, and sociolinguistic differences (as sharpeners do). One must both level and sharpen, i.e. both see the patterns *and* see the

differences. Both sides of the brain are used in native language. Both sides of the brain are needed for native-like foreign-language use.

The research is not complete and not conclusive about which learning styles are most conducive to achieve high levels of foreign language proficiency, and certainly students of all learning styles and personality types can benefit from the incorporation of learner variables such as cognitive styles and personality types into the learning process and individualized learning plan. However, one aspect of high-level language learning stands out clearly: learners must learn to style-flex if they want to achieve native-like proficiency for a wide range of (opposing) learning styles are needed for acquiring language at this level. The wise teacher, then, not only adapts lesson plans to student learning styles but also teaches learning strategies associated with the opposing learning styles and creates activities which require the student to style-flex on an increasingly frequent basis.

For example, synoptic learners who are often cavalier about making slips of the tongue even in their own language can be led to greater accuracy through targeted amounts of old-fashioned drilling, more natural opportunities for repetition, awareness awakening (e.g., reacting very strongly when a synoptic student mis-speaks), and monitor development through repeated tape-recording and mistake-finding. Ectenic learners can be led to a stronger “feel” for the language through etymology activities, work with roots, and semantic mapping—activities that allow them to use their well-honed analytic skills at the same time as they are developing the ability to level differences in order to find the patterns that define the nature of the language.

The kind of activities needed for each student will vary, depending on his or her learning style profile. Every profile is different, and therein lies the challenge and the fun of teaching students at this—and any—proficiency level. The additional excitement in teaching students at the highest levels of foreign-language proficiency is not the challenge of adapting materials and learning activities to students’ learning styles but in adapting students to the learning styles required by the materials and real-life activities that near-native language users must be able to handle.

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## **Treat Learners as Peers and according to their Personality Types**

The first thing that most teachers of high-level proficiency courses notice about their students is that they are not babes in the woods, waiting to be led along the path to their destination. Just the opposite. They are experienced language learners.\* They know what has worked and has not worked for them. They know what their learning needs are, and they know what their destination or goal is. As a result, they are often highly critical of their teachers—and some very good teachers have found teaching courses at the highest levels of foreign-language proficiency to be unnervingly difficult (contrary to the frequent assumption that teaching really capable and accomplished students should be easy).

Since highly advanced students bring much to the learning process, including the knowledge of how to learn, of what they want from their learning experience, and of what they presume to be good and poor methods of teaching, teachers at this level who are the most successful are ones who go “with the flow,” not against it. Step one in most cases is determining what student expectations are.

Of course, the experienced Level 4 teacher is more knowledgeable about the learning process than the student, even if the student thinks otherwise. Step two becomes a negotiating and awareness-development process through which the teacher discusses the student’s goals, strengths, and weaknesses and possible learning plans that will take advantage of the students’ strengths and shore up his/her weaknesses in order to reach the specific goal.

In addition to expectations resulting from previous learning, student personality types can play an important role in a high-level classroom, one in which their language prowess will allow them to hold sway with the teacher. Thus, extraverted students will likely want to do a lot of the talking and, if also synoptic in cognition, may not necessarily even notice when corrections are being made. The role of the teacher in this case is to lead the student from behind, to take notes and correct later, and to help the student develop an awareness of natural error correction (discussed later). Introverted students, on the other hand, may want to have the opportunity to prepare in advance before holding forth. Helping them prepare to deliver public lectures in the target language is an excellent way to develop the monologue skills of any student, but especially of introverts.

Teachers sometimes expect all high-level students to embrace the culture of the society where the foreign language is spoken and to seek out any and all opportunities to interact with native speakers. This, however, is not the attitude of all successful language users. Intuitive-feelers are more likely to meet this expectation than other temperament groups. Intuitive-thinkers often study language because of their interest in systems and linguistics—and they are quite willing to study the culture from afar. Sometimes, they do not even like the culture of the countries where the language they are studying is spoken. Yet, this has not impeded them from reaching native-like levels of proficiency. The successful teacher of Superior and Distinguished students respects such differences in temperament and allows students to acquire knowledge and proficiency and to interact with native speakers in the ways that are comfortable for them and typical for their own personality in their own culture. Indeed, the skilled Distinguished-level teacher helps students to be able to display their own personality traits in culturally appropriate ways such that they come across in the foreign culture as the same kind of person that they are perceived to be in the native culture.

This is not to say that sometimes teachers do not need to encourage students to undertake activities that might be uncomfortable because such activities “are good for them” or because it is necessary to change tone, behavior, and/or content of interactions in order for them to project their personality *as it is* in the foreign

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culture. All students need to be able to interact with speakers from the foreign culture and to interact both appropriately and in ways that allow them to be in as much control of the interaction as they are in their native language (see later). However, interaction with people of like interest and temperament is not only likely to be more comfortable, it is also likely to be more successful—and in reality, most people, even in their own culture, gravitate towards others with whom they share common experiences, interests, and values.

*\*The term, expert language learner, has been used in the language-teaching profession to refer to learners who have learned more than one language and are skilled at language acquisition. More often than not, this nomenclature refers to language learners with lower levels of proficiency in two or more languages and good grades in their foreign-language courses. The expert language learner we are referring to here may be a polyglot (high-level proficiency in two or more languages) but may as well be someone who has gained advanced proficiency in just one language. The expertise is not in picking up languages quickly at the beginning but in methodical and successful acquisition of language to very high levels. The personalities exhibited by these two different kinds of learners can be immense: low-level expert language learners tend to be eager, impatient, and frustrated by slower classmates whereas high-level expert language learners tend to be demanding, controlling, and self-aware. They require different approaches by their teachers.*

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## Promote Learner Autonomy

Generating individualized learning plan, conducting diagnostic assessments, and understanding learners' learning styles and personality types, especially the behaviors of expert language learners, are the underpinnings needed to promote learner autonomy. If any one characteristic of the learning process *is* common to all high-level language learners, it is that the process is neither short nor contained exclusively in the classroom. There will be many times, experiences, and opportunities in which the learner will be swimming in the ocean of language without a lifeguard nearby. The teacher's role, then, beyond teaching the student to be a good swimmer, is to help the student develop flotation devices for when he or she gets in trouble.

Some flotation devices are communication strategies for dealing with and learning from new language and culture input, such as knowing how to ask questions about cultural in culturally appropriate ways, knowing how to change the topic of a conversation deftly, and knowing when and how to excuse oneself appropriate from a conversation or group interaction. Practicing such communication strategies in the classroom can be very helpful in making them resources that are automatically recalled when needed.

Other flotation devices are strategies for controlling automatic negative responses. When finding themselves on *terra incognita*, even the best language users can flounder from momentary confusion, self-doubt, and discomfort. Teachers can emotion-proof their highly proficient students for such situations by creating possible scenarios in the classroom and in the émigré community; in so do-

ing, they can not only provide support, they can also help students develop personalized strategies for dealing with awkward and other difficult-to-manage situations. Teachers can also help students get started in keeping diaries of their observations of their own interactions in social and formal environments, using the diary as an outlet for releasing the emotions associated with the experience.

More than having survival and growth skills, however, learners at the Superior level who are trying to reach near-native levels of proficiency need to know how to continue learning without teacher support. They need to understand the learning process. They need to be able to put together their own individualized learning plans and modify them as circumstances change. They need to know where to find learning opportunities and learning materials.

Becoming self-directed is often less a matter of personality and persuasion than of knowledge and resources. Teachers who send students out to do research and find materials on their own, rather than hand-feeding them, are helping them to build lifelong learning strategies. Teachers who provide them with an understanding of how learning happens (or does not) and how they can facilitate their own learning are providing them with more lifelong learning strategies. And teachers who help them understand what differing kinds of learning opportunities can do for them and show them where to find them or how to set them up are, indeed, preparing the lifelong learner for success.

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## Break Limiting Forms of Strategic Competence

The development of strategic competence has been a focus of teachers of students at lower levels of proficiency for some time. Teachers using communicative approaches in particular have strongly advocated the teaching of strategies that allow students to cope with authentic materials (materials written or spoken by native speakers and intended to be read or heard by other native speakers) at very low levels of proficiency when their linguistic skills are not adequately developed for complete understanding or expression. “Adapt the task and not the text” is the adage, an important one for both content-based instruction and task-based instruction as well as the more generic communicative methods; underlying this adage is the concept that in order to complete the task students will have to use compensation strategies (e.g., guessing from context, applying background knowledge, and circumlocution). As students develop in proficiency, their use of compensation strategies gets stronger and stronger, to the point that these strategies allow them to participate in nearly any social event or accomplish nearly any informal task assigned to them. They can even use compensation strategies to handle many professional work requirements. The definition of Superior-Level proficiency incorporates an ability to use compensation strategies in quite sophisticated ways and liberal doses.

Unfortunately, the definition of Distinguished-Level proficiency does *not* accommodate the use of compensation strategies. Instead of needing to paraphrase when encountering new lexical demands, students are expected to possess a deep and broad vocab-



ulary that is not only adequate to the task of description and connotation but is highly refined and able to project denotations and implications. Likewise, their lexical and structural knowledge must be broad enough to decode not only what is stated but also what is implied and sort it by register, dialect, and deviation, if any, from standard speech. Well developed compensation strategies and an inculcated habit of using them get in the way of reaching this higher level of refinement. For this reason, teachers must force students to leave their compensation strategies behind, to leave the comfortable plateau of using what they know and what is at hand, and to practice using what native speakers use. It is no longer appropriate to “come close.” They must hit the target in all areas of lexical precision, structural accuracy, and appropriate register.

At the same time, metacognitive strategy development, which is often forgotten at lower levels or not as possible with the same level of understanding of the learning process and with the same amount of self-awareness as at higher levels, can be critically important. Asking students to reflect on their language use, learning experiences, and linguistic success and failure in work and social settings can do much to develop the metacognitive strategies that they will need for the remainder of their careers as professional language users.

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## Develop Memory

Foreign language students and teachers, especially those working at high levels of proficiency, know that a memory is key to mastering a foreign language. Teachers at high levels of language proficiency are therefore faced with the task of helping students to further develop their memory, especially memory for foreign language features. Teachers who have focused on this aspect of high-level language development have, fortunately, found instruments to make students' memorization process more effective. Three of these are grammar formularization, memorization techniques, and adaptation to cognitive style.

Grammar formularization is the practice of turning variations into singularities, the complex into the simple, many elements into few. In other words, the grammar is distilled by the teacher to the barest of its component parts. Grammar formularization reduces the cognitive load on the student when dealing with new information, and, therefore, the amount of material that students can memorize increases geometrically. Even the contracted forms of language, irregularities, and exceptions can be shown to adhere to one or another more general formula, which is crucial for Superior level students as they attempt to internalize the underlying linguistic code of the language—the same code that the native speaker internalizes in early childhood.

The second instrument, memorization techniques, involves a variety of exercises that focus on internalization of structure and lexicon. Such exercises can be repetitions, lexical and grammatical substitution drills, requiring students to ask questions based on a

memorized model, requiring students to use newly presented models in meaningful speech, putting selected materials on “memorization cards,” mixing difficult-to-remember units in with easy-to-remember ones, making students responsible for identifying and tracking their own mistakes, requiring students to use the target pattern after being presented with a symbol, slowing down students’ speech so that they have time to control possible mistakes, color-coding new lexical and grammatical features, emotionally charging the classroom during exercises that require memorization, and the purposeful and frequent use of difficult-to-remember grammar features and lexical items in routine communication at times when work on the items in question is not occurring, among a wide variety of other exercises. Such exercises, of course, can be used at any level of instruction; the difference is that at high levels, the complexity and scope of utterances take on a sophistication nearly equivalent to that used by the native speaker.

The teacher’s knowledge of students’ learner styles and personality types and understanding of how these styles promote or impede memorization can help teachers individualize input and practice, making the exercises more efficient. Making sure to start with the big picture before working on details can facilitate the memorization of the information by synoptic learners (those who learn holistically, in top-down ways), just as attention to the details prior to trying to cope with the big picture will help ectenic learners (those who learn atomistically, in bottom-up ways). Extroverts generally prefer memorization activities that involve groups of students whereas introverts prefer to work alone. Since there are many different learning styles and personality types, any of which can be very important (or not important at all) to the learning process of any given student, the teacher at high levels of language proficiency is, once again, first and foremost an analyst, who uses information gleaned from observation to tailor instruction to each individual student.

Success in learning a foreign language depends not only on presentation of the material and teachers’ experience but also on the students’ personal efforts to memorize this material. The student’s efforts can be significantly aided by two things: an awareness of his or her own learning style (i.e. knowledge of how he or she learns and remembers best) and the effective use of mnemonic devices. Both

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these things can be taught to them by teachers who are focused on individualization.

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## **Develop Students' Capacity for Sophisticated Forms of Communication**

Superior-level students should have complete command of typical monologues and dialogues, so, to move upward in proficiency, Distinguished-level students must develop their control over more profound and professionally crucial forms of communicative competence. While some of these forms can be performed at lower levels of proficiency, the Level-4 professional language user must be able to accomplish these in much the same way as an educated native speaker, without resorting to compensation strategies. The tasks that such students can expect to be taught by language instructors to accomplish this level of effective command of communication typically include the following:

- Problem-solving discussion (situations)
- Interpreting language and culture
- Interview
- Briefing
- Formal presentation
- Debate
- Negotiation

Problem-solving discussion. The professional working overseas regularly faces situations in which s/he needs high-level foreign-language skills to solve specific problems. A businessman closing a

deal, for example, needs to meet with his/her counterparts to discuss a myriad of specific details concerning the transaction from transportation, delivery and storage issues, questions concerning insurance, security arrangements, price, payment schedule and credit issues, etc. Although the services of an interpreter may be available, experience has shown that better results are obtained when the representative of the firm conducts the discussion personally in the target language. In most cases, highly precise expression is needed in order not to create new problems caused by misinterpretation of words while trying to solve current problems. Since these sorts of discussions are closely related to the students' current or future work, teachers typically ask students to bring real problems to class in order to build tasks and exercises around "the real McCoy."

Interpreting language and culture. For many American professionals working in a foreign country, informal interpreting is an integral part of the job. The highly proficient speaker needs to be able to move comfortably and seamlessly from one language and culture to the other and back again. His/her knowledge and use of parallel structures, idiomatic equivalents, and culturally appropriate forms of expression need to be honed. The Distinguished-level foreign-language speaker needs to be able to spot a false cognate and to know the subtle distinctions between the way a certain term may be used in two different cultures. While not training to be a professional interpreter, the Distinguished-level foreign language professional needs to be able to transition from his native language and culture to the foreign language and culture without lowering the level and sophistication of his speech. Distinguished-level speakers also must interpret beyond words. In many instances, they find themselves in situations in which they must interpret cultural behaviors and values and discuss in detail concepts which are fundamentally different from those of the target culture and make those concepts clear and accessible to the native speaker. There are, of course, a number of individuals who do work as professional interpreters. For them, all the comments made about this skill are applicable. In addition, they need to have a number of other abilities related to correlating two languages and cultures.

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**Interview.** The process of interviewing someone with the goal of obtaining needed information is an important part of many professional jobs. Using the foreign language for obtaining information directly is unarguably an advantage. The Level-4 speaker is able to control the interview and the content emanating from it through taking charge linguistically, setting the tone, and displaying a detailed understanding of both foreign and native cultures so as to be perceived as an equal partner in the conversation. To prepare for professional-level interviews at higher proficiency levels, students have several needs. These include (1) practice posing questions using complex structures, (2) practice posing these questions rapidly and automatically, (3) strategies for conducting interviews in general, (4) strategies for planning questions in an order that will elicit more information, and (5) automatic control of phrases needed for clarification, for returning someone to a particular topic, and asking for more precise and specific information.

**Briefing.** A briefing serves as a vehicle for transmitting information. This may require stating involved policies, defining or clarifying positions, presenting complex research findings and the like. The content of a briefing may be highly professional, specialized, and, therefore, complex. Briefings transmit information in large chunks containing specific details. They may outline a sequence of events leading up to a particular problem before offering a possible outline of a multifaceted solution. To deliver successful briefings, students need to (1) master complex discourse models that promote organizing their briefings in a clear, logical, and cohesive way, (2) learn the sophisticated expressions used by native speakers when structuring a lengthy monologue on a complex theme, (3) analyze the way briefings are usually structured, and (4) practice planning a briefing in the target language. After delivering practice briefings, students need to analyze them and see what can be improved the next time. They must also prepare to field questions based on their briefing and then practice doing so.

**Presentation.** In a presentation, the student conveys detailed, complex, information as in a briefing but also may state a personal or group point of view. A presentation may contain an analysis of differing points of view and ideas or the evolution of a problem examined



from primarily the presenter's point of view. There are a number of ways in which teachers can incorporate presentations into student programs. For example, an in-depth presentation on a professional topic serves as the culmination of a student's course of study at the SLTC. Working on this project helps the student acquire the most necessary professional-level vocabulary by providing a context for it. The process of preparing for a final presentation involves theme selection, in-depth discussions on the theme in the target language, gradual writing of the presentation (section by section), practice in answering questions on the theme of the presentation, rehearsal, and delivering the presentation followed by a question-and-answer session. This process also prepares students for such professional tasks as television appearances abroad that may call for a statement followed by a question-and-answer session.

**Debate.** The ability of a student to take an active part in a professional argument in the target language attests to almost native-like proficiency. In preparation for a debate, it is necessary to develop a number of abilities including (1) clearly and succinctly posing a question, (2) expressing one's point of view with clarity and precision, (3) correctly understanding the positions expressed by other participants, (4) objectively restating the position of an opponent, (5) making effective use of factual material during the discussion, and (6) using a wide array of lexically and structurally appropriate discourse devices in order to express agreement or disagreement or to introduce one's position. To develop all of these abilities requires training.

**Negotiation.** The professional language user is likely to need to conduct formal and/or informal negotiations. The preparation for negotiation involves developing many of the same abilities needed for preparing for debate, but may need even greater focus on linguistically and culturally appropriate verification and bargaining techniques. Understanding interpersonal behaviors, knowing sociolinguistic aspects of formal interactions, and familiarity with the expectations for and conduct of negotiations (including values, mindsets, *Weltanschauung*, and the like) are essential elements of negotiations and represent areas of important learning for the Level 4 student. Negotiation requires many of the same skills required

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for several of the previously described oral communication tasks, including problem-solving, discussion, briefing, and debate. Therefore, exercises used to develop these skills contribute to the development of negotiation skills.

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## **Develop an Understanding of Native Speaker–Non-Native Speaker Communicative Differences and Close the Gap**

In order for students to reach native-like levels, it is essential that they understand the communicative differences of native speakers and non-native speakers, in other words, the reality within which they live and communicate. Good high-level programs take into account the nature of these differences and help the student striving for native-like proficiency to learn how to use an understanding of the nuances of native speaker–nonnative speaker communication to close the gap between his or her language skills and those of the native speaker with whom he or she is communicating.

High-level students specifically need to understand the difference between the content of speech (meaning) and the form of the utterance/writing (language). When native speakers talk there is generally a complete coincidence of meaning and language, and the listener is not aware of any struggle that the speaker is having with linguistic forms and word choices, i.e. with the mechanics of the language. Rather, the ideas dominate.

One of the goals of the classroom instruction at high levels of proficiency, then, is to help the student move to this same kind of communication where ideas dominate and mechanics are as automatic as they are in the native speakers' communication, where the concentration is on *what* he or she is saying without a need to pay

attention to *how* he or she is saying it. Whereas at lower levels of proficiency, it is acceptable and normal for students to separate the ideational and mechanical planes of communication, at the Distinguished level they need to approach as closely as possible the amount of coincidence that is found in native-speaker communication.

The successful teacher of highly proficient students begins by showing students the most important attributes of native speakers' performance: fluency, readiness, high level of communication control, and ability to use complex structures. For that purpose, teachers of Superior-Distinguished students develop special exercises that correspond to specific communicative goals. For example, at the SLTC, four kinds of exercises are used to bring a Superior-level student closer to the native speaker's performance:

1. Conversation Maintenance Exercises.
2. Preparatory Exercises.
3. Conversation Controlling Exercises
4. Complication Exercises.

Conversation Maintenance Exercises teach students to speak fast, readily, spontaneous and without efforts. Successful teachers help students gain the ability to maintain verbal contact by requiring them to practice giving as long and detailed answers as possible to any question of a native speaker; these exercises teach students to "hold the floor," to produce an unlimited amount of speech, and to control deliberately the amount of talking they do. These exercises also train students to use only automatically controlled patterns. Even native speakers generally choose to be close to their "comfort zones" (i.e. their automatically controlled patterns) when speaking. For non-native speakers, such control is even more important.

Preparatory Exercises help students to accumulate a wide range of vocabulary by developing their ability to talk on various and specific topics. As their name implies, preparatory exercises prepare students for what is ahead: for questions connected with these topics—so that they are ready when native speakers ask questions that are difficult for them.

Conversation Controlling Exercises train students to have complete command of grammar and language interrogative system, var-

ious management expressions, and highly effective comprehension technique. Teachers in Superior-Distinguished programs help students to develop the ability and predilection for using a wide range of question types, reflecting the great variety of question forms available within a given language, including sophisticated syntactic constructions. (Culturally appropriate and linguistically varied question discourse, for some reason, is often ignored in lower-level classrooms.) These exercises also teach students how to survive in the language environment when they have to communicate not with one native speaker but with many of them, and they help students to understand the specific intricate details of what being said by a native speaker.

Complication Exercises provide students with the opportunity to practice embellishing their speech in literate ways. In this way, these exercises help students to acquire sophisticated grammatical expressions, infrequent linguistic elements, intricate discourse elements, socio-linguistically appropriate expressions, nonstandard dialects, slang, and greater lexical precision. They require students to replace less sophisticated, fossilized forms of speech with more appropriate, more refined, more sophisticated expressions, e.g., the use of metaphors, similes, hyperbole, synecdoche, personification, onomatopoeia, and the like. Complication exercises especially well prepare students for the most serious kinds of communication: problem-solving discussion, interpreting language and culture, interview, briefing, presentation, debate, negotiation, academic and political lecturing, and other formal activities.

The traits and skills that are developed by these kinds of exercises help to close the gap between the native speaker and the non-native speaker-student. The native speaker does all of these things unconsciously. High-level students first learn to do these things consciously (at lower levels of proficiency, students are not even aware of the specifics of the differences) at first, and, with time and practice, they draw ever closer to the unconscious linguistic behavior of the native speaker.

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## Develop Automaticity

Superior-level students already have sufficient automaticity to express their thoughts without thinking about the underlying structure. However, students at this level, especially the synoptic learners among them, are likely to express thoughts without monitoring structure at all. While they can communicate effectively in this way, they are perceived as students of the language. Some of these mis-speakings are a matter of making mistakes: they know how to express the thought in a native way but they do not have the expressions under automatic control. Other of these misspeakings are due to the fact that involve more rare or complex forms of structure which the student may not yet have encountered. To reach native-like proficiency, both the common and the rare expressions must be automated. While even native speakers experience slips of the tongue and make careless errors, the errors are different from those of students, and they do not result from lack of automation or lack of knowledge. They usually come from lack of focus, side thoughts, and other forms of distraction.

The teacher of high-level proficiency courses focuses on bringing the student to automaticity in four ways. First, he or she encourages students to spend as much time as possible in the target language environment and to use this environment as a mechanism for language correction and language enrichment. Second, the teacher identifies the structural features that student has learned but not acquired, i.e. those structures that the student is using correctly but not automatically. Third, through intensive drilling and the presentation of multiple opportunities for use of the same structural fea-



ture in various contexts, the teacher helps the student to memorize the structure. Fourth, the teacher forces the student to develop and memorize the essential sophisticated structures that mark a native speaker but remain unfamiliar to the student, i.e. those structures that he or she is not using at all but rather alternatives that are neither correct nor automatic.

In automatization, the student is learning to turn declarative memory (knowledge about the language) into procedural memory (performance by habit, like riding a bike). Through many repetitions (yes, “self-drilling,” if one wills—drilling is not a curse word, nor even a curse, when it is focused on individualized need for changing the kind of memory being used for language processing), students can develop the ability to produce an appropriate pattern immediately, correctly, and at the tempo of the native speaker. Repeated exposure and practice is, after all, how native speakers develop automaticity in their own language.

Communicative methods have been accused of developing fluency at the sake of accuracy. Cognitive methods have been accused of the opposite: the development of accuracy at the cost of fluency. An individualized focus on developing automaticity of expression in students—and this almost always has to be done through skillful diagnosis and subsequent direct instruction—is how teachers of Superior-Distinguished students help their students develop both fluency and accuracy, as is needed for native-like language use.

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## De-fossilize

Once foreign language and cultural behavior is acquired to the level that it is understandable to the native speaker and comfortable enough for the student to get by with, sophistication in expression and behavior generally stops, i.e. fossilizes. Fossilization of incorrect grammar and lexicon has long been considered a hindrance to students trying to reach Superior levels of proficiency. Little thought has been given in the professional literature to the concept of fossilization *at* the Superior-level of proficiency, yet fossilization, perhaps more than anything else, is what keeps students from continuing up the proficiency ladder to native-like competency.

Fossilization at the Superior level can occur in several domains. All of these forms of fossilization must be overcome if the Superior-level student is to reach near-native proficiency. They include functional fossilization, instruction-fostered fossilization, domain-restricted fossilization, affective fossilization, and arrested strategic development.\*

Functional fossilization refers to the continuing use of inappropriate, inaccurate, or unrefined morphosyntactic and lexical forms by students who are learning the language as a second language and perhaps in even stronger form by students who are learning the language as a heritage language. Functional fossilization typically continues unabated since it does not hinder Superior-level students from communication or task completion unless and until some form of direct instruction breaks down the fossilized errors and replaces them with appropriate forms. Most typically, this occurs by the teacher analyzing the errors and patterns of errors and

preparing special drills and opportunities for multiple, frequent, and contextualized use of the correct forms (i.e. natural repetition and practice). In teaching, it is important that teachers use practices that provide students with limited possibilities to remain in their comfort zones, e.g., by saturating the linguistic environment in the language classroom with new low-frequency grammar and vocabulary, more sophisticated discussions of familiar topics, a wide range of registers, and liberal use of idiomatic expressions.

Instruction-fostered fossilization occurs when teachers try to help students feel comfortable in language learning. While important at lower levels, this attitude can be counterproductive at higher ones. High-level students sometimes need to be pushed off their comfortable plateaus if they are to reach a native-like level of proficiency.

Domain-restricted fossilization occurs in Superior-level speech when students become highly proficient in areas related to their personal lives and work experiences and lose the desire or do not have the opportunity to speak at sophisticated levels about topics in other domains. Some students may even display native-like language prowess in their very narrow specialty and assume, therefore, that they are at the near-native level. However, Distinguished level proficiency, by definition, requires breadth, as well as depth. Gaining access to a greater number of domains is one of several reasons why direct instruction can be very important at high levels of proficiency. Teachers can deliberately and planfully take students into domains that they would not otherwise encounter.

Affective fossilization occurs when students' self image and sense of self-efficacy get in the way of continued language improvement. Students, having reached the Superior level of proficiency, often bask in the compliments they receive from native speaker, not considering that anyone who compliments their proficiency first has to recognize that their language is not that of a native speaker. (Some exceptions might be in cases where physical appearance is such that the observer can tell that the student is not a native speaker because of hair or skin color, size, and other incongruous attributes.) Language learners at native-like levels of proficiency have recounted being discouraged from seeking higher levels of proficiency when they were at the Superior level because the compli-

ments started turning into complaints: as they became very proficient, they were accepted as native speakers and their mistakes were taken as intentional, causing affront and other kinds of negative reactions from their native-speaker colleagues. Somewhat defective language “protected” them from the higher expectations and judgments that come from being a language user with native-like speech. Developing awareness of this phenomenon is perhaps the easiest way to help students cope with it: most who encountered it were very surprised and demotivated at first exposure.

Arrested strategic development refers to the tendency to continue to use at higher levels of proficiency the kinds of learning strategies that are more useful at lower levels of proficiency. After spending years getting students to develop such strategies (e.g., compensation strategies), teachers of high-proficiency students need to spend weeks and months eliminating such strategies and getting students to replace them with more appropriate ones for high-level language acquisition.

Most important for the high-level language teacher is to know that fossilization occurs on more than just the level of linguistic forms. Direct instruction with a skilled teacher who has an analytic eye and ear, a strong temperament for driving students in directions, experience in individualization, and tenacity is often a critical factor in a student's being able to attain native-like language competence.

*\*This particular categorization of fossilization types was first presented by Madeline Ehrman in Leaver and Shekhtman's edited volume, Developing Professional-Level Language Proficiency, 2002.*

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## Develop Students' Ability to Control the Linguistic Interaction

Students' ability to control the linguistic interaction includes the development of skills for entering into a conversation with a native speaker, successfully staying in that conversation, and accomplishing their communicative goals. Controlling the linguistic interaction makes students equals in communication with native speakers.

The mechanisms ("rules," "tactics," or "devices") can be used at any level of language proficiency because they are adaptable to specific levels. An instructor of high-level language courses must adapt them to the specific level needed.

Perhaps the clearest example of such mechanisms is the "rule of the expanded answer." This rule advises students to give the most verbose answer possible to the native speakers. This strategy creates an atmosphere of communicative exchange, holds the interest of the native speaker, reduces the amount of (difficult) language directed at the foreigner, limits the language initiative of the native speaker, sets a natural tone for the conversation, and makes the participants in the conversation equal.

Another example is the "island" rule. An "island" is a chunk of foreign language that a student has fully mastered. For example, native-speaker "islands" that Superior- and Distinguished-level speakers must seek to emulate include formal speeches, lectures, and "opening lines," among other canned segments. The use of such islands helps the native speaker to express him/herself more precisely and eloquently, and it can do the same for foreign-language speak-



ers. The language instructor presents islands that are professionally important for Superior-level students and that contain expressions that are especially useful for them. Automaticity of the island depends on the level of the student. Generally, the higher the level of the student, the less important the automaticity of the island. At higher levels, a student is able to fill in, manipulate, and improvise, as needed. An “island” has several advantages. It prepares the student for a conversation with a native speaker in advance: the native speaker cannot catch students off-guard because they are prepared for possible native speaker questions. It instills confidence by putting a very useful tool in their hands and allowing them to feel that the playing field has become more leveled.

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## Expand Students' Linguistic Repertoire

Superior-level students typically have an excellent theoretical knowledge of all parts of grammar and are able to understand and use a significant amount of vocabulary. Nonetheless, the Superior-level student is far from the level of a native speaker in many linguistic areas, including depth, breadth, and refinement of vocabulary; unconscious and intuitive grammatical usage, as well as the range of structures, especially in terms of idiolectal, dialectal, and obsolete-but-still-occasionally-used structures; and syntactic variation. It is the possession of this level of linguistic competence, as revealed by fluidity in synonymous expression, that allows the native speaker to readily create and re-create with the language, whether it be for publication, public presentation and debate, research, negotiation, or other sophisticated uses of language that native speakers make on a daily basis.

The language instructor has a difficult assignment to bring the Superior-level students' linguistic sophistication to this level. This task is complicated because Superior-level students *control* the grammar system but native speakers do not need to control it; they just have automatic intuition about this system. Superior-level students perfectly—and deliberately—control their discourse, but native speakers have a unique capacity to produce fluent spontaneous discourse effortlessly (albeit many native speakers are *not* fluent at producing publishable-quality written language). Superior-level students have expended much energy over several years, typically as adults, in a classrooms and in-country environment accumulate

their vocabulary; native speakers have accumulated a huge memory stock of vocabulary through repeated exposure since birth, as well as literacy work in their school rooms in childhood.

Given this situation, teachers of high-level proficiency courses, when developing students' speaking skills continue to direct their attention to grammar, with the goal of allowing them to acquire specific and low frequency elements found in texts written for the educated native speaker. It is also important to present with a variety of exercises that train them to express intricate and sophisticated thoughts, using low-frequency grammatical structures. The translation of the texts from the native language of the superior-level student into the target language is desirable as well.

The actual improvement of lexicon is accomplished through the application of a group of exercises, the goal of which is to develop synonymous expression. Knowledge of synonymous expressions is the basis of lexical richness. A student, who is capable of giving a full set of synonymous expression for one or another verb or adjective, is distinguished by his self-confidence in his own lexical knowledge and often will beat even a native speaker in this respect.

In L1 education, writing has long been credited with developing learners' language and thinking skills. Besides requiring careful planning, for example, through a formal outline, writing focuses learners' attention on individual words, collocations, idioms, sentence, paragraph and discourse structures. This holds true for writing practice in the L2 as well. In L2 learning and teaching, the practice of writing has several advantages over the practice of speaking in expanding students' linguistic repertoire.

One of these advantages is the fact that writing is a language activity that any writer can control independently of any interlocutor because writers are also the readers of what they write. And reading what one writes creates a critical distance that allows one to plan and reflect on one's wording, one's choice of words and grammatical structures.

Another advantage of this critical distance created by reading one's own writing is the opportunity to stop the automatized flow of language one has worked so hard to achieve and express oneself with more variation and differentiation. This self-monitoring of the automatized flow of language through reflection on its rhetorical

effectiveness provides learners with the opportunity to eliminate Level-3 fossilization by substituting accurate, yet simple language with more complex syntactic patterns and “expanding their range of vocabulary precision and synonymy associated with erudition.” as Shekthman, Lord, and Kuznetsova (2003) have observed.

These processes of planning and critically reflecting on one’s writing are, of course, high level cognitive skills and strategies. Writing thus fosters as much as it benefits from the effective use of L2 learning strategies. As Oxford (1994) observed: “...L2 writing, like L1 writing, benefits from the learning strategies of planning, self-monitoring, deduction and substitution.”

The full use of these strategies would be employed in the various stages of the writing process. For the purposes of expanding learners’ linguistic repertoire at Level-4, the purpose and audience must clearly indicate the requirement for writing at the distinguished level at the outset of any writing assignment. In the prewriting phase, for example, the focus could be on planning the content of the writing task by brainstorming ideas, concepts and associated semantic fields. Here the teacher can seed new vocabulary by offering synonyms for the words and phrases suggested by students and engaging students in a discussion of the nuances of meaning differentiating one synonym from another. Learners should then be encouraged to use the new words and phrases in writing a first draft. In revising the first draft, the focus should be on the appropriate use of these new words and phrases. As a next step and before writing a second draft the focus could be shifted to syntactic patterns and considerations of cohesion and coherence. Recommendations made in peer and teacher review and group discussions should then be incorporated in the second draft. Peer and teacher review of the second draft would focus on the effectiveness of both lexical precision and text organization at the sentence, paragraph and discourse levels in achieving the purpose of the written text for the intended audience.

Less holistic learning activities than producing final copy of a high level writing task are also helpful in expanding learners’ linguistic repertoire. For example, asking students to substitute underlined words and phrases in a model text is a simple, yet effective way to expand learners’ vocabulary including synonymous expression.

Demands made on the students can be controlled easily by selecting different model texts.

Encourage students to experiment with the language. For example, give them fairly narrowly defined writing tasks like narrating an event that is usually related in visual terms through the sense of smell or touch. This will push their creativity and expand their vocabulary. Or have students describe a person in purely positive and then in purely negative terms. These types of exercises that force writing from an unusual perspective expand students' vocabulary in playful ways.

In the U.S., textbooks for English composition at the college level are full of ideas about teaching learners at the advanced levels how to expand their linguistic range of expression. There teachers and learners will find suggestions extending from finding just the right word to enriching your expressiveness through figurative speech to varying your sentences in length and structure as well as using inversion, repetition, parallelism and antithesis for special effects. Making the necessary adaptations to the peculiarities of their respective L2, teachers can make these suggestions their own in teaching effective ways of guiding learners to the linguistic competence required at the distinguished level of language proficiency.

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## Develop Students' Ability to Control Self-Expression

Tailoring one's language to one's audience and purpose of communicating through speaking or writing in the first place is considered one of the hallmarks of the distinguished level of language proficiency. In our native language we have learned through upbringing and education, more or less successfully, to adjust our language register to the person we are addressing.

We address a friend differently from how we address the mayor of our town unless she is a personal friend and the conversation takes place in an informal setting like at a mutual friend's barbecue. If the purpose of our conversation is intended to maintain harmonious social relations with the mayor as a friend, we will in all likelihood engage in informal small talk about our families, hobbies mutual friends and the like in a familiar, if not chummy or intimate tone depending on how well we know our conversational partner. If the purpose of our talk with the mayor is official like a neighborhood petition to increase police patrols at night, we will automatically speak in a formal register. We would assume a friendly and courteous stance that maintains emotional distance to our interlocutor. In this kind of formal situation where we petition an official with a well considered and supported request, we would choose our words deliberately avoiding all slang and vulgar colloquial expressions.

As finding the appropriate register requires deliberation of our choice of words, attention to correct grammar usage as well as thoughtful consideration of the organization of our intentions and ideas, writing practice offers an effective way to learn to control



one's self-expression because writing, as opposed to spontaneous speech, allows time for such careful planning at the word, sentence, paragraph, and discourse level. Moreover, word-processing programs provide writers efficient help in planning, drafting, revising, and final editing of a text.

My students of German as a foreign language, for example, enjoyed answering personal ads in the classified sections of German local newspapers. These ads provided them with the opportunity to practice the familiar register connecting them in a very personal, but socio-culturally appropriate way to the person who had placed the ad. Writing letters to the editor in response to articles in the opinion and editorial sections of national German newspapers that my students found particularly controversial was another motivating activity to practice their control of the appropriate register. In this instance, they worked on developing their control of the formal register with all of its requirements of being well thought out, appropriately worded, respectful in tone, yet persistent in supporting one's argument counter to the opinion advocated in the article they were responding to.

Some of my students were interested in learning how to give public speeches. I would provide them with high-level models that are available from the Department of Rhetoric at the University of Tuebingen as the best German speeches of the year. The department's web-site ([www.uni-tuebingen.de/uni/nas](http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/uni/nas)) provides the printed text of the selected speeches as well as commentaries and explanations why these speeches were selected as prime examples of excellence in public speaking. Students were tasked to use the original speeches as much as possible and substitute the German specific content with content from their native country and culture. Students would then rewrite speeches like those by authors Rolf Hochuth on the deleterious influence of English on contemporary German or Martin Walser on the undue influence of public opinion through the media on an individual's freedom of expression.

I also used this collection of speeches for structured student practice in rewriting particularly complex thoughts expressed in some passages of these speeches in a less formal register. I would frame these tasks in simple scenarios asking students to recapture

the meaning of the selected passages in their own words in a letter to a good friend.

Only the number of interesting models teachers can find limits variations of these rewriting tasks from very formal to informal and vice versa and they are sure to develop students' self-expression in a range of registers from the intimate and chummy to the highly formal.

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## Reduce Students' Accents

Perhaps the most controversial element in defining “native-like” proficiency is the role played by accent. The most remarkable example, pointed out time and again by teachers and testers at high levels of foreign-language proficiency, is the speech of Henry Kissinger. While his erudition exceeds that of even well educated native speakers and perhaps in his writing he can “pass” for a native speaker, the moment he opens his mouth even the least educated native speaker of English knows that this is a foreign standing in front of him or her.

Regardless of how impressive other facets of a language user’s speech are, a foreign accent will mark that speaker as non-native. Most students who are striving to reach native-like language proficiency do want to reduce and/or eliminate their foreign accents. Why? Because having an accent marks them as foreign—and then they are often treated as foreign. Because having a strong accent can actually interfere with communication, and even a moderate accent can reduce the amount of comfort the native speaker feels in communicating with the language learner and, hence, the amount of time spent together, the depth of the friendship developed, and the openness that the native speaker is willing to display.

As with ingrained error in grammar, so, too, ingrained error in pronunciation has to be identified by a capable foreign-language teacher (or speech therapist) and drummed (or drilled) out of the high-level language user. There seem to be no magic pills that will do the trick. Rather, long hours in a language lab, with the help of a trained phonetician are needed; while in the lab, effort spent not

only on pronunciation but also on learning to hear phonemic and allophonic distinctions are important. For some learners (especially auditory ones), being able to hear the distinctions allows them to learn to pronounce them properly. For other learners (especially motor ones), being able to manipulate the oral organs into making the proper sounds can lead to a subsequent ability to make the distinctions auditorily. In the absence of a language laboratory and/or in addition to it, it is often helpful to have students record themselves and compare what they say with the speech patterns of a native speaker.

Phonemes are not the only speech feature that highly proficient language users need to get under control. Intonation can be as important, and sometimes more important, than individual sounds. Often, foreigners are misinterpreted (particularly, their tone or mood) because their intonation differs from that of a native speaker, e.g., they use a falling tone (which is interpreted to mean anger or hostility) where a native speaker would use a rising tone. Language laboratory work, as well as in-class work, should focus on bringing students' intonation in line with the intonational contours of a native speaker. Often, native-like intonation is easier for students to acquire than are the individual sounds, and in some languages, when intonation is native-like sometimes improperly made sounds are not noticed.

For many years, it has been thought that after the age of puberty, and even in some cases, before it, phonetics were fixed, and new phonemes and allophones could be neither heard nor learned. However, while clearly it *is* significantly more difficult and far less common for adults to learn a language without any or much of a foreign accent, every teacher of Distinguished-level students with whom we are acquainted has had at least one student who gives the lie to the assumption, or theory, that it is not possible for adults to approximate a native-sounding accent. Students who want to lose their accents, are willing to invest the time, and have a knowledgeable coach (teacher or therapist) seem to be able to do so.

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## **Develop the Ability to Hear Natural Error Correction and to Obtain Natural Clarification from the Interlocutor**

Natural language correction occurs on many occasions when a non-native speaker converses with a native speaker. Although the native speaker is not a teacher and is not teaching the non-native speaker, correction of a sort does occur, if the non-native speaker listens attentively, because when a native speaker responds to non-native speech, naturally repeating some portion of what has been said when responding, he or she does not repeat the language incorrectly but rather correctly.

As native speakers, when we are corrected, however subtly, in our own language, we recognize the correction. It might be a word, a sociolinguistic blunder, or a cultural faux pas. Typically, we are corrected when our language is not adequately interpretable, i.e. when our interlocutor cannot understand us. Usually when we meet with correction, we note it immediately, often making the correction a permanent part of our linguistic/sociolinguistic/cultural repertoire. (Sometimes, correction is needed more than once.) Sometimes we are embarrassed by the mistake we have made, and sometimes the error is such that we laugh about it with our interlocutor.

Foreign language speakers, however, rarely hear these corrections. They are too frequently focused on wording what they have to say, i.e. the mechanics of their speech, to be as mentally open to input as needed in order to hear natural error correction. Only at the highest levels do they achieve the ability to multi-task in commu-



nication (i.e. speak, listen, remember, and think at the same time). Helping them to learn to listen for natural error correction is a way to speed up their ability to multi-task in a foreign language.

There are two aspects of natural language correction. One is hearing the corrections, and the other is asking for corrections in natural ways. Both of these aspects usually require direct instruction.

Hearing corrections comes more readily to students with auditory learning preferences than to others. Those students who are not natural listeners can be taught to listen for correction indirectly through exercises that are actually intended to teach register; in such exercises students make a statement, the teacher puts it into a higher or lower register, and the student then puts it into a third register. Learning to listen for correction can be taught more directly but spontaneously. When students miss natural error correction, the teacher can deliberately stop the flow of the conversation (which will focus the student's attention immediately) and point out that the student has just been corrected. Any kind of exercise whose goal is the development of attentional focus can be adapted for teaching students to listen in a more sophisticated way.

Students are even less likely to know how to ask for clarification. "Please repeat that" is a request that can be accepted from students at low levels of proficiency but is a conversation stopper at high levels. Obviously, not everything that is said by every native speaker is understood by every other native speaker. Many times speakers are not careful in how they word things, and the information is at best ambiguous and at worse incomprehensible. There are natural ways in which native speakers ask for clarification in such cases. These ways, such as asking for greater detail, repeating the unclear phrase with questioning intonation, and probing ("Just what do you mean by that?"), can be taught through a series of exercises prepared to give students the opportunity to practice and repeat these techniques in the classroom and in real-life situations (such as interviews with native speakers that can be set up as extramural events).

Even students who have achieved native-like proficiency continue to improve their language over time. These two skills—to hear natural corrections and to ask for clarification in unobtrusive

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ways—will stand them in good stead for lifelong language learning success.

Teachers can teach these skills in their classroom by using natural correction in addition to the typical, overt, teacher correction. In such cases, when the student does not pick up on the correction, the teacher can point that out.

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## Build an Understanding of Genre

The use of public speeches mentioned in earlier in developing students' range of self-expression through the gamut of familiar and informal to formal and highly rhetorical registers is one example of building an understanding of genre and developing writing skills by rewriting speeches with different content and in different registers. For purposes of developing a rhetorically effective style, I suggest having students copy selected model texts by rewriting them from their own point of view and with their own content.

There will, obviously, be individual issues like stylistic schemata prevalent in the learners' L1, but not in the target L2. American students learning German, for example, will discover that their school standard of writing as concisely and precisely as possible is not a German academic virtue. More often than not, the American standard of keeping one's academic prose short and simple is replaced in German by its opposite of keeping one's writing long and complex as a badge of honor of the writer's standing as an academician and intellectual. Students will develop this kind of German style by copying their long-winded German models, but making it their own by rewriting the model from their perspective and relating their own content.

Other activities that help develop students' genre competencies include rewriting texts from one genre into another. For example, have students render an interview in an objective third person report. This gets to be a quite challenging task if the interview is laden with emotions. Another task for developing students understanding and control of genre would be to retell a comic story in a narrative

that reflects as fully as possible the original's implications and allusions. Another useful exercise would be to have students rewrite a highly technical text in their field of expertise for a popular magazine and its general readership. What recommends these types of rewriting tasks is their strict focus on genres and their typical organizational forms (report, interview, narrative, technical vs. general audience reports etc.) and their intensive practice of writing giving credence to the insight that writing is best developed through writing.

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## **Build a Deep Understanding of Culture through Film and Television and Social Events**

There are many techniques that have been used in teaching foreign languages. Some techniques are beneficial only for teaching basic level students; some are used only in advanced programs; and some are adjustable and depend on the students' proficiency in the language. The incorporation of films and television into the language-learning program belongs to this category.

If the use of these two devices for advanced level is, first of all, demonstrative and informative and mainly has a supportive meaning helping students to improve their comprehension and speaking abilities, the use of them with superior students is strictly socio linguistic phenomenon. Superior students through films and television begin to cover the gap which culturally divides them from native speakers. That is why the most effective exercises with films are so called "dubbing" or "shadowing" or "echoing" which builds linguistic competence at a higher level of proficiency and which can be characterize as sophisticated form of mimicry.

For example, a student watches a short clip from a film in which the characters use the combination of complex constructions, idiomatic expressions and specific behaviors typical for the target country. The sound is then turned down as the class watches the clip again. During the second playing, students attempt to reproduce what they heard the first time. Their goal is to be as accurate and precise as possible while making a full replay of the text. There

are several variations that can be done with these kinds of exercise. One such variation is to combine the dubbing activity with practice in translation. In this case, students translate the difficult constructions during the playback.

But the most important exercise, which has the same objective, is when superior level students actively participates in this or that social event in the cultural environment of the target country. This when our students do two very important things: they communicate with native speakers trying to be equal to them and at the same time absorb all cultural nuances they need. Usually these exercises, if they are the part of the distinguished level program, are attentively observed by language instructor, who knows that a student requires to use certain amount of complicated expressions and memorize some new and important for him/her language and cultural specifics. So, our student approaches various people, talks with them, asks questions, laughs, explains something to somebody ... and fulfills the language instructor's assignment.

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## Encourage Voracious Reading

The most common contribution to reaching high levels of proficiency reported in self-reports by interviewees who possess various foreign languages at ILR Level 4 and higher is extensive reading—a lot of it. Atwell, for example, a Level 4 learner of English, calls herself a “promiscuous reader.”

The Foreign Service Institute, in its Beyond Three programs, takes into account the need for students to read extensively and the benefits of doing so. In the Beyond Three Russian program, students are assigned independent reading of novels and equally long literature or documents, a list of which is made, together with the teacher, that takes into account students’ general interests.

Voracious reading is not for the purpose of fluency. It is for the purpose of acquiring sociocultural knowledge, genre, cultural and literary allusions and well-known quotations, etc. Fluency already exists at Level 3. There is no need to work on it for Level 4. In fact, that is the problem that we run into here in the States with new teachers at high levels of proficiency: they assume that they should continue to work on fluency issues as they did at lower levels when what the students truly need is intensive work on accuracy and precision in both structure and vocabulary. Voracious reading improves both; already being fluent is what allows the voracious reading to be effective.



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## **Ask Students to Find Materials and Teach Class**

Many approaches have been employed to change students' traditional role in the classroom. A "learner centered" approach usually means the combination of (1) a focus on learners' needs, which is central to decision making about teaching and learning; and (2) an understanding of the learning process, how the process takes place, and how the learning process can be enhanced for all learners. A learner-centered environment respects students' opinions, challenges them, explains to them what is expected from them, allows them to control their learning, encourages them to work cooperatively, gives them the opportunity to work with materials that is interesting and relevant to them, invites them to evaluate the teaching standard and methods, and pays individualized attention to their personal learning styles. Asking students to find learning materials and participate in teaching activities is a good example of making students at the center of learning.

When working with superior level learners, we are endowed with rich resources, not only material resources, but also human resources. We can ask advanced students to help us find appropriate teaching materials, to act as content tutors or teaching assistants, to host class discussions, and to lead class activities. Our students may come from different academic and professional backgrounds. Their combined knowledge is definitely better than one teacher. We should make best use of students' expertise. It is true for all students, but working with lower-level students can be a challenge, because their inadequate language proficiency can be a barrier. The

language barrier is removed when we work with advanced learners. Advanced students have the language ability to participate more actively in learning and teaching.

The most obvious advantage of students selecting teaching materials is relevance and interest. By bringing in materials of their choice, they tell us what they want to learn. Relevance and interest have a marked influence on students' motivation and emotion. Motivational and emotional factors induce both the quality of thinking and information processing. In other words, students can be better learners if they are involved in choosing the learning content. On the other hand, if the content area is defined and students are assigned the task of finding related materials to a given topic, the process of locating and evaluating materials is a valuable learning experience. They are challenged to get to the right sources, find relevant information, and analyze the usefulness and appropriateness of the information. This task demands them to use linguistic, sociolinguistic, cultural, and content knowledge. Such analytical skills are essential for professionals in the real world.

Another advantage of asking students to select materials is that they bring in diversified perspectives. They help to present a more balanced and comprehensive view. For instance, a course on challenges of globalization was offered to advanced and superior level students at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. Students enrolled in the class came from different academic departments and programs – business management, public administration, international relations, translation, trade policies, environmental policies, etc. Each field of study focuses on certain aspects of globalization. A business major wants to know the most effective way of integrating goods, services, and capital worldwide; an international relations major is interested in discovering how globalization has caused the integration of economic, cultural, political, and social systems across geographical boundaries; whereas a translation major focuses on the role of language in the two aspects of worldwide product distribution through internationalization (enabling the product to be used without language or culture barriers) and localization (translating and enabling the product for a specific locale). When students were responsible for finding materials for study and selecting topics for discussion, the whole class gained a more comprehen-

sive picture of globalization. In addition to content depth and width, students were exposed to diversified vocabulary and discourses. As the world moves toward markets or policies that transcend national borders, dialogues among different disciplines will have a positive effect on students' future careers. As we know, complex subject matters usually require more complex language discourses. Students are provided with authentic and diversified language input, which enhanced their language learning. When they construct meaning from information, experiences, and their own thoughts and beliefs to learn about the complexity of a subject matter, the learning is more effective.

Asking students to teach a class or lead class activities is another effective way to improve their language ability. To measure the success of learning, we often test whether the student can create meaningful, coherent representations of knowledge. Teaching gives students the opportunity to practice how to construct meaningful and coherent representations of knowledge, and how to communicate to an audience effectively. Initially, their presentation may be sketchy in an area, but through class interactions, peer and teacher feedback, their ability to use the language can be refined by filling gaps, resolving inconsistencies, and deepening their understanding of the language and the subject matter. It is also a great opportunity for students to use strategic thinking in their own approach to learning, reasoning, and problem solving. They have been using many learning strategies unconsciously. Once teach a class, they will encounter various learning preferences and strategies similar or different from theirs. This enables them to learn about new approaches. Most importantly, though, they are likely to reflect on how they think and learn. Reflection makes them better learners, as they think about how they think, how they learn, how to set reasonable learning or performance goals, how to select appropriate learning strategies, and how to monitor their progress toward learning goals.

In summary, asking students to find materials and teach class works seamlessly with the principles of a learner-centered approach in foreign language education. Students' participation in teaching enables them to express their need and interest, contribute to the

knowledge base, work cooperatively with peers, reflect on their own learning and thinking strategies, and polish their language skills.

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## Teach Handwriting

Even in this increasingly computerized day and age, most of us in the course of our daily lives have to at least on occasion be able to read other people's handwriting. This might consist of telephone messages, letters, postcards, receipts, or notes that have been scribbled on the blackboards of lecture halls. Reading handwriting in one's native language can be challenging enough, but in a foreign language—especially one with a non-Roman script like Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, or Russian—this is a major source of difficulty. Even the familiar European languages such as French and German have distinct cursive styles that differ significantly from American English cursive.

In cursive handwriting, the tip of the writing instrument is lifted from the paper as few times as possible, adjacent strokes being joined for speed and ease of writing, so that what are printed as separate dots and strokes are fused into continuous smooth motions of the brush or pen, since the less often one must pick up the point of one's pen, the faster one can write. This results in a rounding of angles, an increase in the number of interconnected elements, and many more curves and loops than in printing, all of which makes cursive handwriting hard to read. Another reason that cursive handwriting is more difficult to recognize than mechanically produced writing is that there is a greater degree of variation. The factors that may vary include the size of the written symbols, height and width of strokes, relative position of graphic elements, rightward or leftward slant, thickness or thinness of strokes, connected vs. disconnected script, size of loops, presence of artistic flourishes,

and amount of spacing between written symbols, words, and lines. Moreover, cursive handwriting frequently includes various abbreviations and simplifications, such as English “sthg” for “something” or “w/o” for “without”.

Despite the difficulty, the fact remains that since educated natives possess the ability to read most handwritten documents, non-native students aiming to achieve native-like competence in a foreign language must also include attaining this ability among their goals. Proficiency in reading cursive handwriting is especially relevant for those living and working overseas, but readers in the U.S. may also have professional or personal reasons for wishing to read handwritten documents written in a foreign language. The importance and difficulty of reading handwriting are reflected in the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Language Skill Level Descriptions, where there is a gradual progression from (at levels 0+, 1, and 2) recognition and comprehension of typescript only to (at levels 4, 4+, and 5) comprehension of handwriting, including cursive handwriting that is of varying degrees of legibility.

Although there is no substitute for years of practical experience and extensive contact with the native society to become proficient in reading handwriting, direct instruction in class and work with specially prepared training materials can significantly speed up the learning process. Advanced-level instructors and students should ensure that among the reading texts used, there is sufficient variety not only in linguistic content (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, and discourse organization) but also in written form (e.g., typeface, print size, and styles of handwriting).

In an advanced training program, students should periodically have the opportunity to work with handwritten documents, progressing from relatively legible to relatively illegible. The main objective should be reading recognition, not writing ability, which is a more difficult skill to develop and which, in any case, is of more limited utility to foreign students. However, for the purpose of promoting reading recognition, students may occasionally be asked to copy certain high-frequency cursive forms.

The instructor should provide students with background information on the history of the writing system, including cursive forms both past and present. Detailed information on how individual

strokes and components of the writing system are written in common cursive styles should be provided. While such explanation can be useful for students, even more important is copious practice in reading texts handwritten by a variety of different writers.

One useful strategy is first to present a document in the original cursive form and ask students to try to read it in class (or have students read it on their own at home). The instructor can then present students with the same text in printed-style handwriting or type-script for them to compare with the cursive version. Special problems and areas of difficulty should be pointed out and any questions that students may have can be addressed. It is essential that exercises that help learners practice the new material and require them to perform assigned tasks be included. Learners can be asked to read passages in cursive handwriting and find out certain types of information; or they can be asked to answer questions on the content of a passage, rewrite a passage in printed-style handwriting, summarize a passage orally in the foreign language, or translate it into English. One particular problem in recognizing cursive handwriting is that a single cursive form can sometimes represent more than one word or element of the writing system. For this reason, students must be trained always to make careful use of the context.

Textbooks on recognition of cursive handwriting designed for non-native learners are available for some languages; for other languages, there may be orthography manuals and related materials for native learners that can be adopted for use by non-native learners. Instructors may also wish to prepare their own materials. In that case, it is important that the writing samples they provide not all be written by themselves, but include a wide range of materials written by many different writers of varying educational background, gender, and age. Both instructors and students should constantly be on the lookout for handwritten texts that they may encounter in their daily lives, grading and filing them for future use by degree of difficulty. Such authentic materials can be invaluable for personal study, teaching, and the preparation of training materials in reading handwriting designed for others.



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## Teach Dialects

Most languages of the world have both standard forms, which are the kind usually taught to foreigners, and dialects, which may be spoken by sizeable populations of native speakers. There may also be speakers who attempt to speak the standard form but speak it imperfectly due to influence from their native dialect, with non-standard pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar.

Educated native speakers of a language typically understand the general meaning of speech in commonly encountered dialects of their language. For example, native speakers of American English would be able to understand the majority of the English spoken in the American deep South or in England, and educated native speakers of French would be able to understand most speech in the French of Brittany or Provence. Therefore, non-native students aiming to reach native-like levels of language competence must also be able to understand the gist of speech in the common dialects of a language.

The importance and difficulty of understanding dialects are reflected in the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Language Skill Level Descriptions, where there is a gradual progression from (at levels 3 and below) no comprehension of dialects; to (at levels 3+ and 4) comprehension of the essentials of speech in some major dialects; to (at levels 4+ and 5) full comprehension of all speech that would be intelligible to a well-educated native speaker, even in a number of “regional” and “illiterate” or “extreme” dialects.

Currently, in their U.S. foreign language classrooms, learners are typically exposed only to the relatively standard speech of their

instructors and are not accustomed to hearing non-standard accents and usages. This is one reason why, for many of the thousands of Americans who travel overseas each year, communication falters on their first arrival in country. Ironically, the students we now produce are not infrequently better in speaking than in comprehension; that is, they can often make themselves understood to native speakers but may not comprehend what native speakers are saying to them. Certainly, use of non-standard speech is not the only reason for this, but it is a major factor.

Foreign language learners should be made aware early in their study of a language that dialectal differences exist, and they should occasionally be exposed to easy non-standard speech once they attain approximately Level 2. Exposure to dialects earlier than that might confuse them and could interfere with their learning of the standard language. About the time that learners reach Level 3 to 3+, or immediately preceding (or in conjunction with) in-country study, they should be given detailed instruction in listening comprehension of dialects and dialect-influenced non-standard speech.

Though it is true that, to become really proficient in listening comprehension of dialects, there is no substitute for living and traveling widely in the country for a period of years, there are numerous strategies and shortcuts that can be explicitly taught in class so as to make students' learning proceed more efficiently. To help students develop their listening comprehension of different varieties of a language, we recommend that the instructor should:

- (1) Present learners with an overview of the general dialect situation in the country or countries using the language, including information on the background and distribution of the major dialects;
- (2) Provide learners with detailed information on the linguistic features of the major dialects and dialect-influenced non-standard speech varieties, contrasting them with the standard language in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. If possible, the instructor should play audio recordings

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of several common dialects, so that students can begin to develop a “feel” for them. Teach strategies and shortcuts, e.g., that a certain sound or class of sounds in a non-standard variety corresponds to a certain sound or class of sounds in the standard language.

(3) Invite speakers of the major dialects and non-standard speech varieties to come to class to give informal talks to the students about their families, professions, daily lives, etc. The speakers should hail from all walks of life, since there are likely to be substantial differences from one speaker to the next depending on sociolinguistic factors such as level of education, age, and urban vs. rural upbringing. After each talk, which should be recorded for later reference, students should be encouraged to ask the speaker as many questions as possible.

(4) At the next class session, instructor and students should systematically go over the recording of the speaker’s presentation, with the instructor explaining difficult parts and converting (or asking students to convert) into standard speech all the non-standard usages. Students should be allowed access to the recording and should be required, in the language lab or at home, to listen to the recording several more times and answer questions or perform other exercises based on it to be handed in at the next class session.

(5) Include listening comprehension of dialects and dialect-influenced speech on tests and exams. For group tests, a brief recorded passage can be played, with students

instructed to answer questions based on it or sum up the main points of the passage in English. For individual tests, students can be presented with a tape recorder containing a tape of several short passages recorded in the dialects that have been studied. Students can then be asked to interpret into the standard language, or into English, the gist of what the speaker says. Students may be allowed to rewind and replay each section as many times as needed, with the examiner noting down the number of replays each student requires as well as the accuracy of the interpretations.

In addition to improving listening comprehension, training such as that described above has the additional benefits of increasing learners' knowledge of the society and culture, developing their ability to identify a speaker's place of origin from listening to her or his speech, and strengthening their overall language proficiency by expanding their vocabulary and grammar. While developing speaking proficiency in dialects is not included among the training objectives, if the student happens to pick up a few common phrases in several major dialects, this can certainly be useful and enhance her or his credibility in the foreign society.

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*CDLC Staff*

## **Encourage the Use of Models and Native Speakers Rather than Dictionaries**

A survey of foreign language learners who had achieved near-native levels of foreign language proficiency revealed that the vast majority of those using foreign language skills in the workplace much preferred to use models of language and native speakers as lexical aids, rather than dictionaries.

The reason for the preference seems obvious: the models show not only words and sample sentences, but many other aspects of language. Among the most important is text organization. One of the least taught aspects of foreign language is text organization.

Native speakers are also a kind of model. Paying attention to how native speakers use language can serve learners in good stead. Nonverbal communication skills can modeled, interpersonal interaction, turn-taking, register, and many other aspects of language. Level 4 language users are typically capable of watching one or more native speakers accomplishing professional tasks and extracting from the observation the kinds of verbal and nonverbal they need for their own foreign language tasks.

When dictionaries were used, two kinds were preferred: monolingual and specialty. Monolingual dictionaries were preferred for most kinds of work because these dictionaries did a better job of providing nuance and examples of the words in their common usage. In cases of specialty needs, such as engineering or medical ter-



minology, foreign language users frequently turned to bilingual editions where such were available.

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## **Devise Appropriate Study Abroad Programs for Higher Levels**

It has long been assumed that the combination of immersion in the native speech community, combined with formal learning, creates the best environment for learning a foreign language. In a study abroad environment, the key to success is to make students utilize the rich language resources out of the language classroom. Most study abroad programs generally consist of a curriculum for formal language learning, some cultural excursions – including field trips, field research, or sightseeing trips, some type of living arrangements, optional or required learning through work or service – such as internships and volunteering in local communities, and various forms of learner training. To make the study abroad experience worthwhile, each component should add value to the other components and to the overall experience.

The design of a study abroad program is determined by a multitude of complex interrelations. Most language educators believe that a total immersion is most ideal for language acquisition as learners are exposed to the rich linguistic environment. In practice, the degree of immersion varies among programs. Many conditions hinder programs from being totally immersed into the local culture and community, such as the host country's government policies towards foreigners, the willingness and flexibility of the host institutions to accommodate the linguistic and academic needs of foreign students, the linguistic, cultural, and psychological preparedness of the students, students' motivation, and so on. We can use the "study abroad" experience of international students in the US to mirror

American students studying abroad. Even in a highly open society such as the US, total immersion is not feasible for some. A student may not be able to find an American host family. Immigration laws may forbid her to work in a US business. Her inadequate English language ability may not allow her to enroll in a regular academic program. For American students abroad, they are likely to encounter more challenges, particularly in those less open societies. For instance, until recently, the Chinese government's regulations make it almost impossible for a foreign student to stay with a Chinese host family. Consequently, many study abroad programs have to house their students in "international student dorms", separated from Chinese students. Sometimes, a seemingly trivial issue poses a challenge. For some American students, the difference in academic calendars between the home and the foreign institutions prevents them from enrolling in an academic program at a foreign university. Academic programs in most countries, including the US, are not willing to take a student in for less than a semester. The most obvious challenge for immersing into the local academic and professional culture is the learner's ability to use the target language. Similar to the ESL situation in the US, lower level learners are not linguistically prepared to take regular courses taught in the target language. Consequently, they are placed into a "sheltered" language class – sheltered from native speakers of the language. It is fair to say that study abroad programs are scattered along a continuum from "an island in a foreign sea" to "total immersion".

To design a study abroad curriculum for superior level learners, we should first consider their special needs. Superior level learners have mastered the general skills and knowledge of the target language, and have progressed to the stage of applying the language to professional use. In other words, they are at the stage of creating with the language, such as interacting with professionals in the host country, writing a research paper, making a professional presentation for a formal gathering, etc. The creative process is highly individualized. Accordingly, the curriculum design also needs to be individualized.

Depth of processing research indicates that the presentation of coherent and meaningful information brings about deeper processing, which results in better learning. Cummins (1992) proposes a

distinction between two levels of language proficiency: surface-level basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), which involves cognitive processes of learning knowledge, comprehension, and application, and the deeper level of cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP), which requires such cognitive processes as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. As CALP requires more complex language abilities, it is best taught within a framework that manipulates more complex and authentic content. For near-native learners, content-based language instruction is a common practice. Our curriculum should facilitate superior level learners to access the disciplinary courses at local universities. Depending on the learner's academic or professional field, she should be able to enroll directly in the local university's chemistry or political science program, studying the subject matters of her choice, interacting with peers in her field, and immersing into the local academic or professional culture.

In addition to content learning, we may consider using an adjunct model for language training. The adjunct model originally refers to students being enrolled concurrently in two linked courses, a content course and a language course. In our case, it can be a customized "directed study" arrangement. Language training is tied into the student's course work or research at the local university and the socio-pragmatic contexts of the host culture. Such a course is learner-centered. The learner lets the teachers know what she needs. They design a learning plan that considers the learner's current proficiency level (including strengths and weaknesses in all language and culture areas), learning styles, professional interests and needs, and opportunities for learning. The teacher's major role is to encourage independent learning, by directing the learner to useful language resources and effective strategies to solve a problem. In summary, the curriculum should effectively prepare students for the course requirements, cultural differences, and teaching styles of the host university, enhance their engagement in the intellectual, political, cultural, and social institutions of the host country, and encourage independent learning.

Apart from formal academic learning, we should take advantage of the native speech community. An effective method is to integrate academic learning with out-of-classroom activities. Asking students to accomplish some meaningful learning tasks pushes

them to interact with the local residents. Content-related field trips, interviews with local businesses and residents, gathering research data, giving speeches to local communities are some examples of such learning tasks. Formal classroom study is not the only--or even the primary--educational goal of some students who study abroad. Equally or more attractive to many are the possibilities afforded by overseas study for internships, apprenticeships, and fieldwork. Such opportunities broaden the student's experience in preparation for careers in business, law, education, the foreign service, social work, etc. Study abroad programs that offer and support "experiential learning" are growing. "Experiential education" sets study abroad apart from learning at a traditional discipline based institution (Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerichl, 2002). Experiential education means that education is rooted in and transformed by experience. Learning takes place as people test concepts and theories in their experience and as they develop new concepts and theories based upon their experiences. Working for a local organization is beneficial to language learning as students are exposed to interactions at the work place. By participating in problem solving and dealing with special terminology and discourse in a professional field, students use, reflect, and fine tune their linguistic, sociolinguistic, and content knowledge. Learning through working induces the gains of advanced language competence, which is symbolized by the ability to understand the meaning of linguistic variation in a range of different socio-pragmatic contexts. An alternative of internship is for students to volunteer in local communities. Work or service in the native speech community puts language to use, and gives life to knowledge acquired in classrooms.

A major component of study abroad is living in the native speech community. Home stays have been attractive to many, as opposed to dormitory living at an academic institution. By living with a local family, students are exposed not only to the target language, but also to the target culture. Many details in local life, such as special cooking ingredients and techniques, child-rearing practice, interaction among families and relatives, etc., are hard to grasp, if the learner has not lived with the locals. It is these small details that separate a learner from the "superior" level to the "distinguished". Without correct cultural references, it is impossible to sound like a near-native

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speaker. One concern with host families is whether they are typical families in the host country. Generally speaking, families willing to host a foreign student are often more internationally minded and more affluent. We should try to recruit families from various social and economic strata. Other advantageous living arrangements include pairing a local student with an American student in a dorm setting, or encouraging students to live independently in a local community. Such living arrangements force students to interact more with the native speakers.

The final aspect is on learner training. The extent to which the language (be it oral or written) is learned depends on numerous variables, including individual differences in students' learning styles, motivation, and aptitude. Although superior level students score higher on motivation and aptitude than most students, it is always a good idea to make them aware of different learning strategies that may help them in various situations.

In summary, study abroad is different from study at a home institution. The major difference lies in the language environment. We should intentionally utilize the language environment and the international experience as the basis for learning, and incorporate formal language training with students' living and working experience abroad.

In a presentation on immersions, Dr. Dan E. Davidson stressed that just being in country is not enough for students to make progress in proficiency. Students need to be well prepared linguistically. They need to have a structured program of study as well as opportunities to interact with native speakers. They need to be in country for a fairly long period of time.

Dr. Davidson, President of the American Councils for International Education, presented "An Examination of Proficiency Outcomes of U.S. Students of Russian in Immersion Learning Experiences..." at the January 20 Interagency Language Roundtable. Having looked at over 3200 students, Dr. Davidson found several factors which predict proficiency gains in immersion settings: Longer programs give exponentially better results than short ones.

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After three months, 55% of students starting with an S/2 showed no measurable gain in proficiency. 38% moved to a 2+ and 7% moved to a 3.

After ten months, 38% showed no gain, 31% moved to a 2+ and 31% improved to a 3.

Students studying in Russia for the summer did not improve their speaking or reading scores.

Grammar is important. Students who knew their grammar going into the program did well.

Good pre-departure skills in speaking, reading, and listening indicate success on an immersion, with listening being the least important.

Age matters. Younger students seemed to do better than older ones (age range was 18-32 with a mean age of 22). Students who started studying Russian in High School did better than those who started in college.

Gender is not a factor in success.

The longitudinal study has been conducted by ACTR for more than 20 years. The kinds of data that have been collected are unique for their richness in the foreign language field and are a goldmine for researchers into what works and does not work in study abroad programs.

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## *CDLC Staff*

## **Incorporate Childhood Experiences, Including Games, Music, Folklore, and K-12 Studies (Science, Math, History, Social Science)**

Many of the same activities can be used at Level 4 that are used at lower levels, but the orientation is significantly different. Folk songs, for example, are usually associated with the elementary stages of language learning and young learners, but they can also be a rich source of cultural, historical, and linguistic enrichment for adults.

Only a minority of folk songs are children's songs. Most have serious themes which preserve not so much the facts of history as the voices of the people who lived it. In the words of Mary Robinson, the president of Ireland, referring to the Great Famine of 1845-50:

We celebrate those people in our past not for their power, not for their victory...but for the profound dignity of human survival. We honor our people by taking our folk memory of this catastrophe into the present world with us, and allowing it to strengthen and deepen our identity with those who are still suffering [opening the famine museum at Strokestown House, Co. Roscommon, 1994].

In one of the most famous, and often heard, songs of the Famine, “Skibbereen,” a father tells his son of their eviction from their land because he could not pay the rent, of the death of his wife after the eviction, and of his subsequent involvement in revolutionary activities. Like many songs written by exiles in America, this one ends with the hope of someday returning with an army of Fenians to free the homeland

Oh, father dear, I often hear you speak of Erin’s isle  
Her lofty scenes, her valleys green, her mountains rude and wild  
They say it is a lovely land, wherein a prince might dwell  
Then why did you abandon it, the reason to me tell

My son, I loved my native land with energy and pride  
Till a blight came o’er my crops, my sheep and cattle died  
The rent and taxes were to pay, and I could not them redeem  
And that’s the cruel reason that I left old Skibbereen

Oh, well I do remember that bleak November day  
When the bailiff and the landlord came to drive us all away  
They set the roof on fire with their cursed English spleen  
And that’s another reason I left old Skibbereen

Your mother, too, God rest her soul, lay on the snowy ground  
She fainted in her anguish seeing the desolation round  
She never rose but passed away, from life to immortal dreams  
And that’s another reason, I left old Skibbereen

And well do I remember the year of forty-eight  
When I arose with Erin’s sons to fight against the state  
I was hunted through the mountains as a traitor to the Queen  
And that’s another reason why I left old Skibbereen

And you were only two years old, and feeble was your frame  
I could not leave you with my friends, for you bore your father’s name  
I wrapped you in my cotamore [heavy overcoat] in the dead of night unseen  
And I heaved a sigh and bade goodbye to dear old Skibbereen

Oh, father dear, the day may come when on vengeance we will call  
And Irishmen both stout and tall will rally unto the call  
I’ll be the man to lead the van beneath the flag of green  
And loud and high we’ll raise the cry, Revenge for Skibbereen

Almost every line of the song offers opportunities to discuss and expatiate upon the historical and cultural context, as well as the linguistic features of the text itself. Level 4 learners are able, and should be encouraged, to do this research themselves, by using resources such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

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In a lighter vein, songs can challenge not only the learner's historical and cultural understanding but also his articulatory apparatus. In one version of "The Bold O'Donoghue," the singer(s) is called upon to imitate, in jocular fashion, various contemporary English accents:

Well, here I am from Paddy's land, a land of high renown  
I broke the hearts of all the girls for miles round Keady town  
And when they hear that I'm away they'll raise a hullabaloo  
When they hear about that handsome lad they call O'Donoghue

[Ch] For I'm the boy to please her, and I'm the boy to squeeze her  
I'm the boy to tease her, and I'll tell you what I'll do  
I'll court her like an Irishman, wi' me brogue and blarney too is me plan  
With the holligan, swolligan, rolligan, molligan bold O'Donoghue

Well I hear that Queen Victoria has a daughter fine and grand  
Perhaps she'd take it into her head for to marry an Irishman  
And if I could only get the chance to speak a word or two  
I know she'd take a notion to the bold O'Donoghue

I wish me love was a red red rose growing on yonder wall  
And me to be a dewdrop and upon her brow I'd fall  
Perhaps now she might think of me as a rather heavy dew  
No more she'd love the handsome lad they call O'Donoghue

[*Englishman*] Well, here I am from England, a land of high renown  
I've broken the hearts of all the girls for miles from London town  
And when they hear that I'm away they'll raise a dickens, hurrah  
When they hear about that handsome fellow they called O'Donoghha

[Ch] For I'm the fellow to please *ha*, and I'm the fellow to squeeze *ha*  
I'm the chap to tease *ha*, and I'll tell you what I shall do  
I shall court her like an Englishman, with a brogue and blarney too is my plan  
With the holligan, swolligan, rolligan, molligan bold O'Donoghha

[*Indian*] Well, here I am from India, a land of high renown  
I have broken the hearts of lots of girls for miles from Delhi town  
And when they see that I am away they will raise one awful row  
When they hear about that handsome fellow they call Sahib O'Donoghhow

[Ch] For I am the fellow to please her you see, I am the fellow to squeeze her  
you see  
I am the boy to tease her, I will tell you what I will do  
I will court her like an Indian man, with my turban tied as well as I can  
With the holligan, swolligan, rolligan, molligan Sahib O'Donoghue

To these can be added verses by an "American," a "German," a "Frenchman," a "Chinese," etc. The psychological benefits of self-

deprecatory humor should not be overlooked; for once the learner can not reveal his imperfections, even exaggerate them, and receive appreciation rather than correction! The same can be said of joke-telling.

Language play--with puns, jokes, and accents--is an important factor in near-native proficiency. The Level 4 learner should be able to understand, appreciate, and participate in humor in the L2 much the same as a native-speaker does. This requires a dialectal and stylistic range and flexibility that cannot be expected at lower levels.

Singing can also bring out this flexibility and depth. Although professional singers can sometimes imitate native-like pronunciation in a foreign language, this takes a lot of practice and is generally limited to a particular song. It is not a skill they can apply spontaneously. A Level 4 speaker, however--provided s/he has a taste for singing--can often hear, reproduce, and create the same kind of subtle and spontaneous modulations of voice that come naturally to native speakers, both in singing and in normal speech. Singing is thus an appropriate but different kind of challenge for learners at Level 4 than at lower levels.

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## Teach Music and through Music

In teaching music, many activities can be used at Level 4 that are used at lower levels, but the orientation is significantly different. Folk songs, for example, are usually associated with the elementary stages of language learning and young learners, but they can also be a rich source of cultural, historical, and linguistic enrichment for adults.

Only a minority of folk songs are children's songs. Most have serious themes which preserve not so much the facts of history as the voices of the people who lived it. In one of the most famous, and often heard, songs of the Famine, "Skibbereen," a father tells his son of their eviction from their land because he could not pay the rent, of the death of his wife after the eviction, and of his subsequent involvement in revolutionary activities. Like many songs written by exiles in America, this one ends with the hope of someday returning with an army of Fenians to free the homeland.

Almost every line of the song offers opportunities to discuss and expatiate upon the historical and cultural context, as well as the linguistic features of the text itself. Level 4 learners are able, and should be encouraged, to do this research themselves, by using a wide variety of the same kinds of resources that native speaker students would use in analyzing such songs in literature classes: critical analyses, literary criticism books, genre histories, specialty dictionaries, etymological studies, and the like.

In a lighter vein, songs can challenge not only the learner's historical and cultural understanding but also his or her articulatory apparatus. In one version of "The Bold O'Donoghue," the singer(s)

is called upon to imitate, in jocular fashion, various contemporary English accents.

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*Sources:*

Morrissey, Michael. 2001. *Song and Story: An Anthology of Irish Folk Songs*. Books on Demand.

## **Provide the Appropriate Kind and Quantity of Work (e.g., an educated environment)**

Identification of “appropriate kind and quantity of work” is important for any individualized, learner-centered and proficiency-oriented program but it becomes really and truly crucial in the process of designing, developing and implementing of the so-called short-term project- or task-oriented mini-courses (the author participated in design, development and implementation of this type of courses during her work at SLTC) These courses are usually designed for students who have 3/3+ levels in speaking and reading and listening, but who need to prepare for specific communicative job-related tasks at a near-native level of proficiency. Below is a generalized description of this type of courses.

Short-term project- or task-oriented language mini-courses present an intensive proficiency-oriented content-based language program taught to individual students or small groups. The individualized, learner-centered and content-based nature of the courses is reflected in many aspects of the course design, development and teaching.

The general educational goal of the course is to improve a foreign language oral proficiency of a student on the material of a specific professionally-oriented topic by enriching his vocabulary, grammar models, and specific terminology connected with the topic.



The usual duration of the course was from 10- to 40 hours of in-class instruction combined with extensive home assignments including reading, listening and writing.

The communicative job-related task as the basis and the focus of a course is chosen by the student. Sometimes a student chooses to focus on more than one task. Among the most popular communicative tasks were formal presentations at a conference, interview, negotiation/discussion.

The instruction for this type of courses is usually provided by one professional instructor, although a second and sometimes even a third instructor may be invited on special occasions for specific instructional activities and exercises. Activities with the participation of native speakers are also included in the program. During the course, two or three instructors may work with each individual student in turn. All instructors are native speakers and professionals in language teaching of superior level students.

These proficiency-oriented courses are taught on the basis of "The Shekhtman Method of Communicative Teaching" (SMCT), (Leaver, Shekhtman, 2002). Like other communicative approaches, SMCT differentiates between language usage and language use, uses goal-oriented teaching that focus on proficiency outcomes, employs authentic language use in the classroom, authentic tasks, and so on. A detailed description of the methodology appears in "Developing Professional-Level Language Proficiency" (pp. 119-140).

The type(s) of learning activities and exercises depends on the communicative task or tasks of a student and his/her level of accuracy. All of the individualized courses include the system of communicative exercises developed in the Specialized Language Training Center. The goal of each group of exercises is to master certain communicative sub-goal that is essential for being able to perform the communicative task. The ratio of communicatively oriented to structurally based exercises depends on the level of the student's accuracy and the knowledge of thematic vocabulary.

Due to the fact that each course is expressly designed for the student based on his/her professional requirements and current level, the texts and other study materials are chosen with each individual student in mind and thus the set of texts is updated each

## *What Works*

time. Only authentic language materials are used. The usual package of instructional materials includes:

5-10 texts on the chosen professional topic with accompanying pre- and post-reading activities and assignments. In choosing the texts with a student, the instructor pays close attention to such considerations as terminological vocabulary enrichment, specific discourse structure, stylistic characteristics of required register, etc.

Audio- and video- materials on the chosen professional topic with accompanying pre- and post-listening/watching activities and assignments,

Hand outs prepared for conducting various communicative and structural exercises,

Specific assignments based on previous work, and instructions for writing tasks,

Quizzes and tests

The communicative and structural exercises are chosen based on the patterns of mistakes made by the student. The instructor analyzes these mistakes and chooses appropriate material. Commercial textbooks are sometimes used selectively for this type of "remedial" work.

After the course is completed the student's performance is evaluated on his or her ability to function in "real-life communication" and to perform the communicative task selected at the required level of proficiency. This means that by the end of the course, the student may, for example make a formal presentation before an audience of professionals who are native speakers. The presentation is followed up with a question and answer session, and the overall performance is evaluated by the audience. Was the content delivered in form and manner approximating the expected performance of a

native speaker who is a specialist in the same field? Does the overall performance meet the ILR Skill Level Description for Level 3+?

The effectiveness of this type of language courses and their popularity among students can be explained by the fact that they are designed, developed and implemented on the basis of “a number of characteristics that differentiate today’s cutting-edge programs”, i.e. authenticity, content, learner-centered instruction, higher-order thinking and adult learning...(Leaver, Shekhtman, 2005, p.14-18) and because of that are successful in motivating students and giving them self-confidence in language global proficiency.

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## **Choose an Appropriate Approach and Teaching Method**

Most current American methods used at lower levels of foreign-language proficiency can be successfully used in teaching superior language student. Let us say, during the preparation of students to talk on a certain topic we may use the grammar-translation method in reading the text on that topic, analyzing grammar structures of this text and translating some parts of it with the purpose of transferring some elements of the text into the students' speech. We may use audio-lingual or direct approach in helping our students to memorize some expressions which they will need to use in the text of their island. If it is needed we may augment the cognitive input by offering our students to listen silently to some tapes connected with the theme of the island to prepare them for deeper understanding of the target grammar and vocabulary. Of course, we, for sure, will use many typical communicative exercises, such as role-plays.

Current language teaching methods are based on the accurate assumption that there is an insurmountable gap. None of these methods intend to bring students to the native speaker's level; they only intend to improve the given student's level or at best to push students closer to a superior command of the foreign language. Indeed, all published foreign language textbooks adapt to the student's level, which is always lower than that of the native speaker.

Teaching superior language students needs new approaches, methods and techniques, which must be based on the principals of native speaker's performance. It is significantly important to understand the salient elements of a native speaker's communica-

tive manifestations and to turn these elements into the principals of teaching superior level students. For example, in spoken communication, native speakers demonstrate fluency, readiness for any topic, high level of communicative control, and the ability to produce very complicated speech. What are the specific aspects of these elements? How can one use them in teaching superior level students? The answers to these questions are crucial to developing new approaches in teaching superior level students.

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## About the Contributors

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## About the Coalition of Distinguished Language Centers

Presaging the current growing popularity of and increasing dialogue on this topic, professors and instructors who had been working successfully at this level for more than twenty years, representatives of a number of university high-level programs and centers, banded together in 2002 to establish the Coalition of Distinguished Language Centers (CDLC), with the goal of sharing this unpublished treasury of knowledge via conferences and publications. Another purpose of the CDLC was and is to conduct research in this nearly ignored area of foreign language acquisition.

Many of the individual members of the CDLC contributed to the seminal volume on teaching to the highest levels of foreign language proficiency, *Developing Professional Level Language Proficiency* (ed. Betty Lou Leaver and Boris Shekhtman), published by Cambridge University Press in 2002. They continue to contribute to publications of the CDLC, which consist of a number of books on high-level proficiency, the proceedings of CDLC conferences, and CDLC's annual journal, *Journal for Distinguished Language Studies*, which is distributed internationally.

Since 2002, the CDLC has held annual fall conferences in Washington, DC and near-annual spring conferences either in Monterey, California or Amman and Irbid, Jordan devoted to a discussion of teaching and learning foreign languages to near-native levels of proficiency. The conference sessions have been conducted in Arabic, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. Publications

The institutions associated with the CDLC have grown in number over the past years. They include several American institutions, as well as the University of Kassel in Germany and the Consortium

### *CDLC Staff*

for Distinguished Language Studies in Jordan. More information can be found about the CDLC and its members at the CDLC website, [www.distinguishedlanguagecenters.org](http://www.distinguishedlanguagecenters.org).

## CDLC Publications

*Achieving Native-Like Second-Language Proficiency: A Catalogue of Critical Factors: Volume 1: Speaking* (Leaver)

*Achieving Native-Like Second-Language Proficiency: A Catalogue of Critical Factors: Volume 2: Writing* (Al-Khanji, Brendel, Hoskins, and Jasser) (in progress)

*Achieving Native-Like Second-Language Proficiency: A Catalogue of Critical Factors: Volume 3: Reading* (planned)

*Achieving Native-Like Second-Language Proficiency: A Catalogue of Critical Factors: Volume 4: Listening* (planned)

*Communicative Focus: Teaching Foreign Language on the Basis of the Native Speaker's Communicative Focus* (Shekhtman with Kupchanka)

*Diagnostic Assessment at the Superior-Distinguished Threshold* (Cohen)

*How to Improve Your Foreign Language Immediately* (Shekhtman)

*Individualized Study Plans for Very Advanced Students of Foreign Languages* (Leaver)

*Journal for Distinguished Language Studies* (Volumes 1-4; Volumes 5-6 in progress)

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*Teaching and Learning to Near-Native Levels of Foreign Language Proficiency: Proceedings of the Spring and Fall 2003 Conferences of the Coalition of Distinguished Language Centers* (Leaver and Shekhtman, editors)

*Teaching and Learning to Near-Native Levels of Foreign Language Proficiency II: Proceedings of the Fall 2004 Conference of the Coalition of Distinguished Language Centers* (Dubinsky and Robin, editors)

*Teaching and Learning to Near-Native Levels of Foreign Language Proficiency III: Proceedings of the Fall 2005 Conference of the Coalition of Distinguished Language Centers* (Dubinsky and Butler, editors)

*Teaching and Learning to Near-Native Levels of Foreign Language Proficiency IV: Proceedings of the Fall 2006 Conference of the Coalition of Distinguished Language Centers* (Butler and Zhou, editors)

*Teaching and Learning to Near-Native Levels of Foreign Language Proficiency V: Proceedings of the Spring and Fall 2007 Conferences of the Coalition of Distinguished Language Centers* (Wardat and Ehrman, editors) (in progress)

*Working with Advanced Foreign-Language Students* (Shekhtman)

## *What Works*





Many articles have appeared that condemn the appalling state in which very few Americans are able to communicate at a native-like level of language and culture with citizens of other countries. Underlying these articles is the assumption that native-like language competence cannot be acquired in a classroom. While contact with the culture is essential, it is possible—imperative—to assist students through direct instruction. This is what successful language learners repeatedly say.

The articles in this book present a “smorgasbord” of practices focusing on what must be taught if students are to reach a level approximating the native speaker. The “recipes” for developing high-level proficiency contained in this booklet represent successful practices that in some cases have been used for more than two decades. This is the first time that the information has been distilled into one concise set of formulae for getting from low-level to high-level.

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